

3

棚架ユウ

イラスト/るろお

転生したら 剣でした

"I became the sword by transmigrating"

Story by Yuu Tanaka, Illustration by Ito

I Was a Sword When I Reincarnated

– Tensei Shitara Ken Deshita –

- Volume 3 -

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[CardboardTL]

CHAPTER 85

THE CITY OF DHARZ

“Leaving.”

“Take care of yourselves out there.”

[Are you sure it’s okay for us to leave you with all that stuff to do?]

“I mind not. The tasks you have left me are but ones that come with the profession.”

Jean’s healed up quite a bit over the course of the past few days. He’s finally able to walk again, though he does still need to borrow Bernado’s shoulder.

Jean said that he would handle all the administrative stuff that needed to be done. More specifically, he was going to report the matter to both the guild and country by handing the diary off to the proper authorities. He was also going to go purify the parts of the floating island that broke off and fell once he was done with all the paperwork and whatnot. He said that we didn’t have to worry about it because we were still in the midst of a journey. He had time, and though I was somewhat inclined to disagree, he insisted we didn’t.

That said, I was pretty grateful that he was willing to go out and handle it all. At the very least, I’ll make sure I properly dispose of the giant slabs of rock sitting around in my dimensional storage. According to Jean, we should be able to just dump them in a volcano or anywhere else that’s heavy on the earth element. If we just did that, the malevolent spirits possessing the rocks would naturally go away. Other possible places we could dump them included the bottom of the ocean, the interior of a canyon, or really anything along those lines.

“And with that out of the way, I bid you farewell.”

“Nn. Later.”

“Woof!”

[Take care of yourself!]

Fran got on Urushi's back. We took off immediately after saying our goodbyes.

"Come back and visit some day. You will always be welcome here."

We moved so quickly that the laboratory seemed to vanish in the blink of an eye.

[He was a pretty good guy.]

"Nn."

[We really should come back and visit him some time down the line.]

"Woof woof!"

If we stayed on schedule, we would've long departed Dharz and gotten on a southbound ship, but we'd yet to reach the city. Luckily, things were looking up. There were no longer any obstacles between us and the city.

I sank into thought as we travelled.

Was that lich... really a lich? Well, I mean I guess it technically was, but, I mean like... who exactly did we fight? Did we fight the person who wrote the diary or his other personality?

I mean, it seemed to me that the whole reason his personality got all twisted was because of the Furnace of Malice or whatever it was it called, but, we ended up destroying said furnace. I'm pretty sure the "evil" lich had control before we destroyed the furnace, but what about after?

Would we have been able to survive if the Lich had really gone all out? Did he hold back in the end, or...?

Well, no point thinking about it now. It's not like I'm actually going to be able to come to a conclusion.

"Master?"

[So which lich were we really facing in the end...?]

“Nn?”

[No, it’s nothing. I’m just glad that both that Lich and Stephan were able to pass on.]

“Nn.”

Two days passed by in the blink of an eye.

The portside city of Dharz was finally within our sights.

[I can see it!]

“Ooohh!!”

Our view of the city expanded as we climbed a hill. The sight that awaited us at its peak was a magnificent one, an ocean that glimmered a brilliant sapphire alongside a beautiful portside city. Though the city itself was a bit smaller than Alessa, it carried with it an air of elegance. Its docks were filled with ships of all shapes and sizes, it almost looked like it came right out of a painting.

“Woof woof woof!”

[What’s the matter Urushi?]

“Sea. Happy.”

[Oh, right, now that you mention it, I don’t think he’s ever seen the ocean before.]

“Bark!”

[Alright, in that case, why don’t we head on over to the beach in a bit?]

“Woof!”

Urushi began rapidly wagging his tail back and forth. He seemed really excited.

“Fun.”

[Really?]

“Nn. Never been to the beach before.”

Ah, right. Fran used to be a slave, so she probably never got a chance to play by the oceanside despite the fact that she’s been on a boat before. I guess we could spend a bit more time on and around the beach before we leave. It’s not like the City of Barbra is going anywhere just because we didn’t rush on over, right?

[Alrighty then, what are your thoughts on a beachside picnic?]

“Curry?”

[Curry isn’t exactly the type of thing you’d eat at a picnic... I was thinking something along the lines of sandwiches.]

“Curry sandwiches?”

[Well... I guess a few can’t hurt.]

“Nn!”

“Woouooooof?”

[I know, I know, I’ll prep you something too. What do you think of bone-in meat?]

“Woof woof!”

I can’t tell if they’re excited because we’re having a picnic, or if it’s just because of the food...

That said, we couldn’t just head over to the beach right away. We first had to find ourselves a place to spend the night, preferably somewhere comfortable. There was a chance that we would have to stay in town for a few days before we could find a ship headed to our destination.

[Urushi, could you shrink down a bit? We’ll walk the rest of the way.]

“Woof.”

The big wolf immediately transformed into its smaller, more dog-like mode before running after Fran. The two immediately found a path that led us straight to town.

Apparently we weren't the only people on said path either. We ran into a bunch of different groups travelling to and from the city. For some odd reason, they always moved out of our way the moment they saw us.

I ended up writing it off as Urushi's fault. Fran and I basically see him as a dog because we know him pretty well, but it'd make sense for the average person to see him and go “holy crap, a black wolf!” It only really made sense for them to want to avoid us. Luckily, he had a crest to prove that he was Fran's familiar, so no one turned tail, screamed, and ran away the moment they saw him. That said, if he was alone, they probably would've already sent a few adventurers after him.

We soon arrived at the town's entrance, unintentionally intimidating all we passed on the way.

I was expecting the town's guards to demand an inspection or something, but to my surprise, we managed to get by pretty easily. All we needed to do was show off our documentation and pay the 300 Golde entrance fee. ^[1]

[Alright, why don't we look for an inn or something like that first?]

“Not the beach?”

[We'll go after we find a place to stay. Though... the city sure does seem quite lively.]

The city's a bit smaller than Alessa was, but there seems to be somewhere around twice as many people out and about. That's a portside city for you, a guess.

[I mean, you probably don't want to end up camping out again despite finally getting to town, right?]

“Ofc.”^[2]

[Where in the hell did you manage to pick that up...? Whatever. Anyways, let's go find ourselves a place to stay. We should probably take a look at the adventurer's guild too

so we can sell stuff.]

One of the most apparent similarities that Dharz shared with Alessa was the fact that both their main streets were practically littered with inns. Since we had so many to pick from, we decided to go for something a bit higher end. The cheaper ones could be unsanitary, so I figured it'd probably be better for us to avoid them.

"Full again."

[Hmm... that's weird.]

We visited five different inns, but not a single one had a room to spare. At first, I suspected that the shopkeepers were intentionally denying us service, either because Fran was too young, or because they didn't want to lodge Urushi, but it seemed that they were actually telling the truth.

[Why don't we just head over to the guild for the time being? They might be able to help us out.]

"Nn."

We were quickly directed towards the guild after asking around for its location.

The Dharz branch seemed significantly smaller than the one set up in Alessa.

"Hello."

"Welcome!"

We were greeted by an deep, intimidating voice the moment we opened the guild's doors, and it was at that exact moment that I began to pity Dharz' adventurers. Alessa's receptionist was a beautiful young woman in her prime. Here, they were stuck with a buff ass dude. Oh how unfair the world is.

"Did you need something from the guild, young lady?"

"Want to sell materials."

"Sorry little lady, but we only buy from adventurers round these parts."

“No problem. Adventurer.”

“W-What? You’re a rank D adventurer? And the card... appears to be the real deal. Give me a second.”

The man held Fran’s guild card up to one of the guild’s crystals. It read without any issues, thereby evidencing its genuity.

“I-It’s real! So you truly are a rank D adventurer, little miss!?”

The buff receptionist shouted in surprise. His voice was so loud that it attracted a few of the adventurers that’d been sitting idle within the building.

Roughly 20 adventurers had gathered around the bar placed in the building’s center in a matter of minutes.

“Man Moj, yer just pulling my leg here, right?”

“Come on, it’s gotta be fake. You know it, I know it, cut the shit already.”

And that was pretty much how everyone’s reactions went — not that it mattered. Mojh, the receptionist guy, had already verified the card’s integrity.

Annoyingly enough, the other adventurers wouldn’t shut up about it at all, so we weren’t able to actually get anywhere though.

“Still buying?”

“R-Right. My bad. You’re the real thing, so I can buy whatever you’ve got.”

“Nn. That spot ok?”

“S-Sure.”

Fran completely ignored all the other adventurers despite the fact that they were making a huge fuss and headed straight towards the Material Exchange Counter. She began placing materials on top of the leather sheet they used for material exchange.

Specifically, she first placed all the materials from the 10 or so lesser magic beasts we encountered on our way here before following with a few of the things we picked up from the undead within the lich's dungeon.

We didn't sell all of the materials we got from said dungeon because some could be used to mix potions and the like. The only ones we sold were the ones that couldn't be used for anything but armour.

The more materials she piled on, the louder the adventurers got, but after the pile reached a certain height, their excitement started to die down; the boisterous noise was rapidly replaced by low murmurs.

And by the time she started pulling out materials from rank D magic beasts, everyone had stopped talking altogether. The room had gone silent.

"That's all."

"..."

"Nn?"

"..."

"Hello?"

"Sorry... I was just a bit surprised is all."

"Transaction."

"I'll get right to it, but there's a lot I have to go through. It should take about an hour to process. Would you mind waiting, or...?"

(What now?)

[Let's try asking him for a room or something.]

(Got it.)

And so, Fran asked Mojh about inns that might still have vacancies, only to receive a...

less than favourable answer.

“It’s fairly difficult to get your hands on a room round this time of the season.”

“Why?”

“As I’m sure you know, the Lunar Banquet is coming up soon.”

“Nn.”

“So, yeah, that. It’s something that happens every season. Barbra holds a huge festival every third month, and as a result, many folks tend to gather here in order to head over via boat. Thanks to that, the inns always end up booked completely full.”

“Ohh...”

Crap, it looks like we actually might have to end up camping out somewhere.

Fran seemed to know what this Lunar Banquet thing was, so I guess it’s probably one of this world’s regular festivities.

[Hey Fran, what’s this Lunar Banquet thing?]

(Festival.)

[Well, I mean I figured that much.]

(Full moon.)

[But aren’t full moons kinda like normal?]

(Only during the banquet.)

I tried to make sense of what Fran told me.

The Lunar Banquet is something that only happens once every 3 months.

This world has seven different moons. There was one large one, and six smaller ones. Apparently, the only time you’d ever be able to see all seven at once with the big one

full was during the festival.

If it only happens once every three months, then I guess that means they only get “full” moons four times a year.

Oh! I get it now. The date marked on the calendar we found in Alessa was supposed to denote for the Lunar Banquet.

Today's the twenty sixth, so that means there should be five more days until it happens.

Instead of sitting around inside the guild and just waiting the whole process out, we decided to visit a few more inns in the meantime. Unfortunately, all of the ten odd inns we visited were booked to the brim. The only rooms that were left over were reserved for nobles and the like.

What a pain in the ass...

[Looks like we didn't manage to find anything yet... Oh well, it can't really be helped. Let's head back over to the guild for now so we can grab the cash they owe us.]

“Nn.”

Worse comes to worst, we'll ask the guild to let us borrow like one of their tavern's corners or something.

CHAPTER 86

BEACH TIME!

We went back to the adventurer's guild and grabbed the money they owed us. All in all, it totalled up to 120k Golde, which I would say was a pretty worthwhile amount. All we needed to do now was find ourselves a place to stay, and we'd pretty much be free to go do whatever else we wanted.

But despite our efforts, we weren't able to find any sort of lodging whatsoever. Crap, what do we do now?

Fran was already three stages past being just bored of looking around.

"Master. Beach."

[We haven't got a place to stay yet.]

"Can stay at the guild. I want to go to the beach."

"Whimper..."

Oh god damn it! Not you too Urushi!

Eh, I guess it can't really be helped. We'll give up trying to find a place for now and go spend some time playing by the seaside.

[Alright, alright, I get it. Let's head over to the marketplace so we can buy ingredients and whatnot.]

Screw it, if we're going to just mess around, we might as well enjoy ourselves as much as possible.

"Nn."

"Woof!"

The most important part of having a good time was to first get everything you needed set up. Knowing that, we first headed straight to the marketplace. Dharz' had a port, so I had the sneaking suspicion that here, we might've be able to get our hands on stuff we'd have a lot of trouble getting elsewhere.

It turned out that I was spot on. The market was stocked full of the ocean's bounty. The first thing to catch my eye was an odd, bright blue salt. It looked like the type of stuff you'd buy if you really wanted to splurge; it was listed at ten times the price of even the finest white salt.

Apparently, said blue salt was one of the city's specialities. You couldn't get it from anywhere other the rank G dungeon that sat right outside the city's boundaries.

Fran immediately perked up upon catching wind of the word "dungeon," but quickly lost interest as she was told more about it.

The dungeon was relatively small. All in all, it consisted of but a single floor. You could make it all the way to the dungeon core in about thirty minutes and the only notable thing you could get was blue salt. The magic beasts that inhabited it were not only weak, but also few and far inbetween. Even I quickly grew bored of hearing about it, so Fran losing interest was practically a given.

I mean, it did sound like a pretty fun experience, at least at first. I mean, you would have to have the ability to both breathe and fight underwater in order to even get to it. That, however, was where all my interest waned, as the dungeon itself was just a regular, above water cave. You could even buy the only valuable thing the dungeon produced on the market, so... yeah. No thanks.

"What's that?"

[It's a fish type magic beast. They call them Pyragenia, and apparently they taste pretty damn good.]

"And that?"

[Pretty sure it's just a crab claw, albeit a really big one.]

"Bark."

[Do you want one, Urushi?]

We quickly went around the marketplace and bought whatever caught our eyes before finally heading to the beach.

It's still early spring, and it's kind of cold, so there aren't any other people around. We've basically got the whole thing to ourselves.

"Beach!"

"Woof woof!"

Fran took off her shoes and cloak and made a beeline straight for the sea the moment we arrived. Urushi quickly followed suit and immediately jumped in after her.

The water temperature was pretty much about as low as you'd expect it to be given the time of year, but Urushi's got fur, so he should be fine despite the temperature. As for Fran... well, I guess she'll be okay if she uses magic to warm herself up.

[Hey, calm down you two. You guys are going to-]

"Uaahhh!"

"Whimper."

Just as I was about to warn them, both Urushi and Fran opened their mouths only to have their gaping maws filled to the brim with seawater. And as you'd expect, both immediately spat it back out with frowns plastered across their faces.

"Blech"

"Whimper!"

The two were then swallowed by an incoming wave and thrown back onto the beach. Their sopping wet bodies were left sprawled all over the sand; the sea had treated them exactly as it would a pair of corpses.

Fran was a person whose stats far surpassed what was commonly thought of as the human limit. Urushi was a Darkness Wolf, a magical beast with incredible power. Yet,

both were reduced to mere puppets by Mother Nature's hands.

[The sea's full of nothing but saltwater, so you're not exactly going to have a good time if you let it get in your mouth.]

"Didn't know."

"Yelp..."

Both Fran and Urushi were really looking forward to the whole beach thing, but the sudden series of unfortunate events seemed to have completely killed all their enthusiasm.

"And it feel gross."

"Whimper..."

[What do you mean?]

"Feet being swallowed."

"Woof..."

Ah, right. When the waves wash over your feet, you kind of get pulled towards the sea together with the sand you're standing on. Neither Fran nor Urushi seemed really enjoy the sensation. They felt quite the opposite, in fact.

[Are you guys not feeling up for it anymore then?]

"Nn..."

"Woof..."

The two trudged their way back over to me as water continued to drip from their sogging wet bodies. I could almost swear that they were about as gloomy as they'd be at a funeral.

[Why don't we eat so you guys can get all cheered up?]

“Curry...?”

[I didn’t actually make anything else yet, so sure, why not?]

“Nn.”

[Here’s something for you too, Urushi.]

“Woof.”

I brought a giant hunk of meat out of my dimensional storage for the latter of the two to enjoy...

The fresh sea breeze almost seemed to embrace us as we ate a meal under a clear, blue sky.

It seemed that Fran had never experienced anything quite like this, and so, her mood gradually recovered. That said, I wasn’t about to let her go with nothing but a bad impression of what I considered a wonderful waterfront playground. I mean, she had still yet to enjoy all that the beach had to offer. Spending a day by the beachside meant so much more than just messing around in the ocean.

The first activity I had her try was one of mankind’s most fundamental seaside pastimes.

“Fishing rod?”

After scouting around the beach for a bit, I found what was effectively the ideal fishing spot. I was going to make sure Fran enjoyed her beach visit, and this was pretty much the perfect opportunity, so I quickly led her over after she finished eating.

The area was a bit rocky, but that wasn’t really much of a problem. In fact, the change of terrain made it all the better as far fishing spots went.

Fran had fished in lakes and rivers before, but this would be her first time fishing for anything that lived in saltwater.

I made a doppelganger and passed it a fishing rod as well. You know, now that I think about it, the last time I fished was before I reincarnated. It’s been a while, so I really

wanted to give the old skillset a polish.

“Target, big fish.”

[Yeah, let’s do our best.]

“Woof woof!”

An hour passed.

“Woah.”

“Woof woof woofety woof!”

[Alright! Pull it in!]

I was pretty worried that we weren’t going to catch anything. If that happened, then Fran might’ve seriously ended up disassociating the word “beach: from any sort of positive connotation whatsoever. And that, in my mind at least, was be equivalent to a sort of tragedy.

“Success.”

“Woooooof!”

[Wow, it’s pretty big.]

The fish was undoubtedly a big catch. Though its features were a bit grotesque, it measured in at a flopping 80 centimeters in length.

As for me... yeah, I didn’t really catch anything. But who cares! All that matters is that Fran enjoyed herself! My pride doesn’t hurt in the least. Ahahaha... haha... ha...

[Why don’t we eat this thing right here and now?]

“Nn!”

“Woof woof!”

I quickly crafted an oven with magic, lit it aflame, and got ready to cook our catch.

[How about playing in the sand while it cooks?]

“Playing in the sand?”

[Yeah, give it a shot.]

“By... hitting the sand?”

[Well, I guess you couuuuld have a sandball figh- wait no! That’s not how you play in the sand! You’re supposed to build sandcastles and dig giant holes and stuff.]

“Understood... Will try it. Urushi, let’s go.”

“Woof.”

[Don’t go too far!]

“Nn.”

Wait, what should I even be making? I guess sashimi’s the most obvious thing that comes to mind, I’d really hate to just limit it to just that. I guess I’ll also grill some of it. Fish soup sounds like a pretty good idea too.

I gave the fish a quick once over before actually preparing it. It didn’t look like it was poisoned, nor did it seem like any sort of magic beast. Its meat was a beautiful shade of white, and it had all the delicious fishy oils that you’d normally expect out of well... fish.

Yeah, I’m definitely going for sashimi. The grilled fish is definitely in too, especially since I can season it with the blue salt we bought earlier. I could even taste test it by making myself a doppelganger.

I decided to grab the crab and clams we bought off the market earlier and use them in the fish soup. Naturally, the combination of a Japanese person and fish soup implied the use of Miso. This world’s Miso was a bit sweeter than the Miso we had back home, but that wasn’t really much of an issue at all. I had more than enough soup stock available too, so operation soup was a success.

[Alright, that's done.]

I finished cooking after about half an hour, so I decided to go grab Fran and Urushi.

[Huh?]

My voice leaked out in an obviously stupefied tone. Welp, I guess this is my fault. I really shouldn't have concentrated so much on cooking.

Fran had built a massive western styled castle in the time I spent making food. All in all, it was five whole meters in height.

It looked like she had used earth magic to excavate the area around her masterpiece, and wind magic to form its shape. I mean, I know I told her to make a castle, but this, this was far out of the scope of what I was expecting. You couldn't even really call it a mere sandcastle anymore. It was more like a sculpture, a piece of art, and an elaborate one at that.

In fact, it was so fancy that I almost wanted to call her out for having gone overboard. The only conclusion I could come to was that Fran was fairly artistically talented, and, as her guardian, I felt the urge to encourage and foster said talent.

It looked like the sand she'd used to make said castle was supplied by Urushi, as he had dug a huge hole nearby. He evidently went overboard too, as said hole was something on the scale of a crater.

Upon closer inspection, I realized that Urushi was in fact still continuing to dig. He was digging and digging and digging his heart out with everything he had. Oh yeah, that's right. Digging is something dogs like doing.

"Pant pant pant pant"

Yup, he looked like he was having a tonne of fun.

So what exactly was I supposed to do about this whole overly fancy castle situation?

I honestly hadn't the slightest clue.

CHAPTER 87

A PAIR OF GRUNTS

We went back to town after a day of beachside leisure. Since we'd yet to find a place to spend the night, we began looking for one right away.

And as for Fran's sand castle? Yeah, I didn't really have any choice other than leaving it there. I mean, I wanted to demolish it, but then Fran started staring at me with a pair of tear-filled eyes, so I couldn't bring myself to actually do it. That said, we at least filled up the hole Urushi dug out — with magic, of course.

We ended up spending more time at the beach than I was expecting; the sun was already far past its halfway point. Given the time, I decided to give up on trying to find a place on Dharz' main street, so I had Fran venture into the city's alleyways in order for us to check out some of the cheaper inns.

And that was when it happened.

(Master.)

[I know.]

We were being tailed.

Specifically, two men were following us around.

[They don't seem all that great at concealing themselves, so they're probably not that strong.]

(Fight?)

[Let's head somewhere without any people first.]

"Nn."

[Urushi, stand by in Fran's shadow, alright?]

(Woof.)

Fran turned the corner and conveniently ran into a dead end. Sure enough, the two men showed themselves soon after.

“You lost, little lady?”

“We can help you around town if you want.”

The way they called out to us made it seemed like they were accustomed to saying those exact lines. I guess their strategy was to first corner the person before making them lower their guards by speaking in a kind manner.

“No thanks.”

“Aw, come on, don’t be like that.”

General Information

Name: Eric

Age: 34

Race: Blue Cat

Job: Merchant

State: Normal

Status Level: 17/50

HP: 78

MP: 40

STR: 37

VIT: 33

AGI: 52

INT: 29

MGC: 21

DEX: 42

Skills

Transportation of Goods: Lv 2

Commerce: Lv 2

Pickpocket: Lv 4

Short Sword Arts: Lv 3

Detainment: Lv 2

Night Vision

Equipment

Crude Iron Short Sword

Deerskin Chestplate

Deerskin Shinguards

Earrings of Silence

General Information

Name: Farego

Age: 38

Race: Blue CA

Job: Warrior

State: Normal

Status Level: 22/50

HP: 168

MP: 136

STR: 49

VIT: 50

AGI: 68

INT: 44

MGC: 39

DEX: 61

Skills

Assassination: Lv 2

Silent Actions: Lv 3

Short Sword Arts: Lv 4

Throwing: Lv 2

Shadow Slip: Lv 2

Night Vision

Equipment

Iron Shortsword

Bearhide Armour

Black Mantle

Ring of Dexterity

They were totally small fry. The only thing that even remotely caught my attention was the assassination skill that the second guy had, so I quickly gave it a once over.

Assassination

Rarity level 3

Raise the damage of the first hit performed by a percentage equal to the skill's level.
Only activates if the user performs a surprise attack.

So it maxes out at 10%? That's not that bad. A 10% boost to my telekinetic catapult would be quite devastating. Unfortunately, skill taker's going to be on cooldown for another 75 days, so I can't really jack it from him. The reason for its super long cooldown was because I used it to take Unsealable away from the Lich. Unsealable was of rarity level 8, which meant that skills without levels would be treated as ones that were completely maxed out.

Anyways, just looking at their statuses pretty much told me that they weren't exactly what you'd call decent people.

"Ya know, getting lost round these parts is prettty easy."

"Not lost. Needless concern."

"Come on now..."

Crisis detection activated right as the man's expression began to warp. He no longer was trying to put on the airs of a good natured guy that just happened to have a criminal-like face.

"One more step and will treat as enemy."

"Hah?"

"Won't get out unscathed. Best to run."

"Shut up and get over here you little shit!"

"Gyahahahaha! This one's got a lot of spunk."

"Make sure you don't hurt her. Her price'll drop if you do."

Man, you know, every single blue cat we've ran into has been like this. Literally one hundred percent of the blue cats we've met have been nothing but scum.

Fran silently draws me and gets into a battle-ready stance.

“Huh? You wanna fight punk?”

“Oh, you think you’re tough shit, you little brat? We’ll kick your bitch ass!”

The two men leisurely laughed at Fran. Evidently, they didn’t feel the slightest bit threatened. That was about to change. We were going to make them beg for their lives.

“Warning was given.”

I activated parallel processing and began casting magic the moment she finished speaking. The skill’s effects allowed me to easily fire off two different spells at once.

[Stonewall]

[Silence]

I sealed off their path of escape with earth magic by blocking them in with two different walls before soundproofing our surroundings with wind magic.

This way, there wouldn’t be any witnesses.

[Don’t kill them, alright?]

(Why?)

[Oh, you know, I just wanted to ask them a thing or two.]

(Understood.)

“W-What?”

“H-Huh? Huh?!”

The two men were thrown into a state of confusion by the sudden series of spells. The merchant didn’t even take up a defensive stance or anything. He wasn’t prepared for anything even remotely like this.

There were a few noises as Fran dashed around and hit the two men in turn.

Annnnd it was over. That was it. Both men lay on the floor unconscious. The warrior had managed to put up a little bit of a fight, but Fran was just too far out of his league.

“What now?”

[Tie them up for the time being, I guess.]

I created a few threads for her to use. The threads I made weren’t all that strong, I’d yet to master the skill. That said, each was still about as durable as a rope made of hemp.

What I wanted to know was their backgrounds as individuals. The two blue cats had seemed to say that they wanted to sell Fran, which implied that they were underground merchants that’d kidnap people and turn them into slaves against their will.

Given that we were in a portside city, I’d say that it was fairly possible for them to gather a bunch of slaves abducted from the Kingdom of Kranzel and have them shipped off by sea. I recalled Fran saying that she went through a similar sort of experience, after all.

The blue cat tribe’s slave merchants were Fran’s bitter enemies. And thus, I too acknowledged them as enemies. We might end up facing off their organisations some day in the future, so it’d be a pretty good idea for us to gather up every single possible bit of information we could.

[So yeah, that’s why.]

“Understood.”

I was thinking of having a clone interrogate them while Fran kept watch outside, but my plans were quickly shattered as the girl in question started to kick the two men.

“Get up.”

“Ugh... what the hell...”

“Shiet bro, what happened...?”

“Urushi, out.”

“Woof.”

“Hiii!”

“Uwahhhh!”

The two men were frightened by the 3 meter tall wolf that appeared out of nowhere. They tried to run away, but both their arms and legs were bound, so they couldn't even so much as stand up, let alone escape.

Fran seemed to be fuming with a sort of silent rage, but it didn't last for long. She almost immediately interrupted their screams and began to speak.

“Question.”

“Y-you think you can get away with this, you lil punk? You know who you just messed with? You ain't leaving this city with your head on your shoulders! You li- argh!”

Fran kicked the merchant right in the face as he tried to speak in protest. Blood immediately began spurting from his nose.

“Shut up. Only speak to answer questions.”

The two men immediately fell silent upon exposure to Fran's complete and utter lack of mercy. They were obviously terrified.

“Are you illegal slave merchants?”

“W-What are you talking about gurl? W-We don't even know what that thing yous saying is.”

“W-We merchants gurl, good hearted ones.”

Yeah no. The principle of falsehood immediately revealed his words to be lies.

[Fran, I'm a hundred percent sure that they're lying. They're definitely a part of the business.]

"Are the slaves somewhere in the city?"

"I already told you that we don't know shit gurl! Chill!"

[That's a lie too.]

"Nn. Are there more of you?"

"Come on! We don't know nuttin! We swear!"

[Another one.]

"Might not torture... if you talk."

"Come on! How many times have we told you that we don't know nuttin!? Man, what's the matter with you!"

"Yea gurl, he right. "

"Urushi."

"Growl!"

"Hey gurl! Daz not cool! Come on, cut a brotha some slack!"

"This wolf likes human flesh. Livers from live prey. Favourite."

"Growl growl!"

Urushi slobbered all over one of the men whilst letting a low growl. It was as if he was declaring that he was about to enjoy a meal. The two men immediately paled in response.

"Spill it. Unless want to be eaten alive."

“Man, come on, I was just saying that I don’t kno- Arghhhh!!”

Fran drove me into the back of the warrior’s hand, and slowly began grinding me deeper though his muscles.

“Argghghghghghgh!”

“Hey man, you alright?! This stupid bitch ain’t – Argh!”

“Learning disability?”

Fran kicked the merchant’s face yet again, this time, completely pulverizing his nose in the process.

“Greater Heal”

“Huh?”

“Shiet? Ain’t dat some super high tier ass healing magic?”

Fran pulled me out of the warrior’s hand and healed him. The wound I made instantly disappeared, and was once again filled by flesh and bone. And as she did, a slight glimmer of hope appeared on the blue cats’ faces.

They determined that the girl wasn’t actually going to kill them, that there was no way a mere child would intentionally commit murder. They hoped that there would be some sort of convenient and logical reason that would allow them to keep their lives.

But Fran’s words completely crushed all their overly optimistic expectations.

“Lucky. Not the type to die easily. Now can use Fire Arrow.”

“Ughh!! Arghhhhhh!!!!!!!”

“Greater Heal.”

The warrior’s carbonized hand was once again healed back up to its normal state.

“Won’t let you escape. Not with an easy death.”

“Arggg!”

“Hiiii!”

Screams of despair escaped the men’s mouths. There was nothing they could do to get away from Fran. They weren’t even permitted to die so long as she continued to heal them. All that awaited them was a life of eternal torture.

“L-Listen here gurl, we gotchu a deal! We got lots of gold stored away, ya know!”

“Don’t need.”

“Alrihgt, alright! What if we gave you-”

“Stupid? Want information.”

“G-Gurl, we said we ain’t got an- arggggg!”

Fran kicked the merchant for a third time and broke every single last one of his front teeth.

“Skill. Can see through lies.”

The two realized that they had no other choice but to talk, and so, they soon began to answer Fran’s questions in an honest a manner as they could.

Our suspicions were spot on. Dharz was home to one of the blue cat tribe’s underground slave markets. Slaves captured from all over the Kingdom of Kranzel would be gathered here before they were shipped off to the Kingdom of Reidos. Apparently, their base of operations used to be Barbra, but the country caught on and crushed it.

Thinking about it, I’m pretty sure that was exactly what happened to Fran. She was probably abducted from some foreign country before being sent to Barbra for processing. The country probably caught on right about when she arrived there, and thus, they decided to move her to another base somewhere else in Kranzel. We probably met whilst she was being shipped over to Dharz.

The Kingdom of Reidos buys slaves for quite the price, so the merchants had been using Dharz as a point of transportation and processing for 10 odd years now.

And so, after learning all that, we asked them the hideout's location, the number of slave traders, and the number of slaves.

"H-Hey, we've told you everything now, so you can let us run free, right gurl? You gunna help us, right?"

"We'll change! We swears it !"

I heard their pleas, but ignored them. Immediately after obtaining all the information we needed, I cut their necks right off their heads with a single blade of magical wind.

They'd probably tell their organisation about Fran if we let them go, and I didn't exactly feel like it was a good idea to have some sort of underground organisation after us. And I mean, they were the kind of people that kidnapped and sold children, so the world was probably better off without them anyways.

I put their bodies in my dimensional storage for the time being. Now that I think about it, the insides of my dimensional storage have really started to get all messy and chaotic lately...

"Nn. Thanks Master."

[Don't sweat it.]

"What now?"

[Well, that depends. What do you want to do?]

"Spring cleaning."

Yeeaap, I figured she'd say that. I originally wanted to have her wait somewhere while I made a doppelganger and raided the place with Urushi, but I already used it earlier when we were playing around by the seaside. Much to my announce, I actually couldn't use Doppelganger Synthesis again till the day after tomorrow.

[You should probably at least wait till night time.]

“Nn.”

[How about we go find somewhere to stay first.]

It took us quite some time, but we were eventually able to find ourselves a room at cheap inn. There, we waited until it was time to begin our assault.

Note: Clone = the ones from his crappy skill. Doppelganger = the ones from the SP skill. Just to be clear, they're separate skills and only Doppelganger Synth has a longer cooldown.

CHAPTER 88

FRAN THE ASSASSIN

[Alright, let's go.]

“Nn.”

It was two in the morning. Everyone was asleep, and even the drunks had gone home.

It didn't take long for us to arrive at the slave traders' hideout. We made use of Urushi's Dark Magic, Espionage and Presence Concealment in order to hide ourselves. They shouldn't be able to locate us, but I prepared Fran a mask just in case they did.

The hideout was fairly close to the port itself. Its first floor was supposedly said to be a warehouse, and the second, a sort of living quarters. The building was guarded, but only by a single person.

[We'll probably get noticed if we take it too slowly.]

“Nn. Blitzkrieg.”

“Bark.”

Fran made her move. She used Silence to dampen the sounds made by her movements and cut the guard down before he was able to so much as react. In fact, he probably didn't even get to see her shadow before losing his life. I immediately put his corpse in my dimensional storage, and we moved on.

[Alright, why don't we start from the top?]

There was no point in doing something as stupid as kicking down the front door.

“Nn.”

Fran infiltrated the building by leaping onto its roof, cutting one of the windows open, and climbing inside. Naturally, she continued to keep quiet through the use of Silence.

We immediately stumbled across a bed with someone inside of it, but luckily, he didn't wake up. Appraising him informed us that he was one of the slave traders.

[He's an enemy.]

(Nn.)

Fran casually thrust me through his chest and impaled him right through the heart.

“—!”

The man woke up in response, his body throbbing in pain, but he wasn't able to so much as make a noise. Silence made sure of that. I put the corpse away before he even managed to start leaking blood, and as a result, not even the slightest speck of evidence was left behind. We had just pulled off the perfect assassination.

[It looks like they're probably keeping the slaves underground, in a basement or something.]

“Clean up first.”

[Yeah. It'll be easier to free the slaves if we do.]

We decided to do the world a favour and “disinfect” the floor in its entirety. And so, we acted in the same manner as would most other assassins, we murdered every single slave merchant we came across in cold blood. Most of them were stronger than that Gyuran guy we killed in Alessa, not that we had even the slightest bit of difficulty given that they were all asleep.

Chances were, we probably wouldn't have had any trouble with them head on either, especially given how much stronger we got through the exploration of the Lich's dungeon. We only bothered with stealth because it would prevent any alarms from being raised.

[This should be the last room.]

It took us five minutes to clear out the entire second floor, a single room outstanding. All in all, we killed six different slave merchants.

The room before us, however, was unlike the rest; its lights were still on, and I could sense a single presence within it.

[Would you mind, Urushi?]

(Woof!)

[Make sure you stay quiet.]

(Woof.)

Urushi eliminated the target and came back after 10 or so seconds. He was as quiet as I'd expected.

[It seems to feel a bit different from all the other rooms.]

The room's interior design reminded me of a study. A single blue cat was lying dead on the room's desk. His clothing was relatively fancy, it seemed like he was an executive of sorts.

[I'm going to rummage through his desk real quick.]

I fished around a bit and went through most of the documents they had. The only thing of interest I could find was a note detailing the number of slaves sold to the Kingdom of Reidos.

I'd like to hand this over to the proper authorities if possible, so I decided to hold onto it for the time being.

After looking around a bit, I noticed that there was a safe in the room's corner. It was made of iron, and it looked like the type of strongbox in which you'd put your valuables. Searching the man's corpse allowed me to quickly find the key. The safe itself wasn't radiating any magical energy, so it probably wasn't a trap.

Fran opened the safe as I awaited the results with bated breath.

[Woah]

“Treasure.”

The safe contained about 100k Golde alongside a bunch of jewelry and the like. I guess you could say the safe was, in a way, a sort of treasure box. I didn't really mind stealing from criminals, so we grabbed every single last bit and shoved it all inside of my dimensional storage.

[There isn't anyone else in the second floor.]

The next thing we had to do was tidy up the first floor. There were a tonne of people there though, and they all seemed to be awake. Given that it was a warehouse, there probably wouldn't really be many places to hide either. We'd be put in a really bad spot if someone managed to escape after seeing Fran's face. Ideally, I'd prefer them not to even see her figure. I didn't want them realizing that it was a child that raided the place.

There were a few slaves mixed into the crowd, so we couldn't just blast our AOE's and wipe everyone out. They also seemed to have an underground escape route for emergencies, so a few would probably manage to get away if we made a big fuss. We used infrared vision, echolocation and presence detection in tandem to learn as much as we could before initiating. It seemed that the most troublesome part of this whole thing would be the one room with five different people inside of it. We decided to save that for last and clean out the rooms with only one or two people in them first.

[Let's go.]

“Nn.”

“Woof.”

We did the same for the first floor as we did for the second; we eliminated all noise by using silence before cutting open window and climbing in. I used silence again once we entered each room, and Urushi immediately moved to kill the man that tried to raise an alarm in response to our sudden intrusion.

We quickly did the same for two other rooms, one with one person in it, and the other with two.

“Room filled with stuff.”

[Yeah, it kinda reminds me of Jean's lab.]

There were a bunch of raw materials laying around along side the equipment needed to process them. It seemed like they were making a bunch of different things, as the shelves contained life potions, vials of poison, and a fair number of medicinal products.

[This stuff looks pretty useful.]

"Take?"

[Hmmm, that seems like a pretty good idea. We could probably use it to make potions and stuff while traveling.]

"Nn. Take."

We plundered so much stuff that it almost seemed like we'd forgotten our initial purpose in coming here.

[Alright, with that out of the way, why don't we go wipe the rest of them out?]

I didn't know how many people there were left in the basement, but the only room on the first floor that remained was the one with five people in it.

The plan was to infiltrate using silence before having Urushi use one of his dark magics, Black Veil. The spell would deprive our targets of their vision so we could kill them all in one fell swoop before they got so much as a chance to run away.

And it worked. Fran had the ability to search sense enemy presences, and Urushi could detect any and all life forms, so the two were able to easily wipe out all five slave traders without any issue.

[That's both the first and second floors down.]

"Basement next."

[Based on what they said yesterday, the organisation should be made up of 24 people in total, so at most, there should be four more of them.]

“Nn.”

We went down the stairs as stealthily as would a group of ninjas. The basement we descended upon turned out not to be a basement at all. It was a dungeon. There were two guards at its entrance, but we killed them instantly. They weren't even really paying attention in the first place; they were lazily facing off against each other in a game of cards instead of doing their jobs.

[Alright, why don't we save the slaves now?]

According to the documents we grabbed from upstairs, there were currently seven different children trapped here. They were all already wearing slave collars.

“Who... are you?”

Fran's sudden entrance left the children in the basement in a state of surprise. It took them a bit to recover, but after a few moments, the one who appeared to be the group's eldest, a boy, timidly looked towards and called out to us. He seemed to give off the kind of air you'd expect from nobility despite his current status as a slave. The contrasting combination made him seem a bit like a cheeky brat, but whatever. One of the girls standing behind him seemed to look a lot like him. The two were probably twins.

“Hero.”

“Huh?”

“Came to help.”

“But what about the kidnappers? They should be up there...”

“Defeated them.”

“You did?”

“Nn.”

“...”

The imprisoned children look at each other in turn. Well, I guess it only makes sense for them not to believe what Fran was saying. They couldn't believe that a girl that looked even younger than them could've defeated twenty odd criminals.

"Move back."

"Huh?"

"Back off from cage. Dangerous."

"S-Sure..."

A loud swish resounded throughout the room; Fran swung me and instantly cut the cage's bars to pieces.

"Huh?"

"No way..."

The children stared blankly as the cage collapsed. They didn't understand how they were supposed to react.

"Hurt?"

The female twin's leg seemed to have an injury on it. There was a cloth wrapped around it, but it hadn't really gone through any other sort of treatment. She was likely to get infected, at this rate.

"Middle Heal."

"Huh? It's better now?"

"Woah, are you a mage?"

"That's awesome!"

The children started to ask Fran a bunch of different questions, but she didn't respond.

[Fran!]

“Nn. Someone came.”

We felt someone enter the building. It was probably an enemy. Shit, we have to get rid of them before they catch on.

Fran had suddenly gone silent whilst looking up at the ceiling, so the children began feeling anxious.

“W-What’s wrong?”

“Stay inside. Hide.”

“Huh? What?”

“Don’t leave. Wait for me.”

Fran pushed the children back towards the prison before grabbing me and heading up the staircase.

[Looks like he’s wandering around on the first floor.]

“Searching for something?”

[Yeah, he’s probably trying to figure out what happened to the other slave traders. Make sure you put on your mask.]

“Nn.”

We climbed the stairs whilst erasing our presences. The enemy that’d arrived was a decently strong looking man. He was fully armed, and not too bad at concealing his presence either. We were only able to detect him because we had a whole bunch of different skills working in tandem with each other. If not for that, we probably wouldn’t have noticed him at all.

General Information

Name: Salrut O'Randy.

Age: 55

Race: Human

Job: Dark Knight

State: Normal

Status Level: 51/99

HP: 469

MP: 458

STR: 236

VIT: 219

AGI: 155

INT: 210

MGC: 244

DEX: 169

Skills

Dark Resistance: Lv 6

Assassination: Lv 4

Intimidation: Lv 5

Espionage: Lv 3

Presence Concealment: Lv 3

Divine Sword Arts: Lv 1

Sword Arts: MAX

Divine Spear Arts: Lv 2

Spear Arts: MAX

Court Etiquette: Lv 3

Shield Arts: Lv 8

Way of the Shield: Lv 7

Interrogation: Lv 4

Poison Resistance: Lv 4

Poison Magic: Lv 3

Storm Resistance: Lv 6

Detainment: Lv 5

Paralysis Resistance: Lv 4

Dark Magic: Lv 7

Automatic Life Recovery

Vigour Manipulation

Magic Manipulation

Minor Strength Boost

Titles

Oathbreaker

Equipment

High Quality Dark Mithril Longsword

Blackened Mithril Shield

Blackened Mithril Armour

Black Tiger's Sky Mantle

Bracelet of Magic Resist

Ring of Bonds

Holy shit, he's strong! And he looks like he's an enemy, especially since he's apparently a Dark Knight instead of a regular one. I mean, his skills all seem to be inclined towards darkness, and his title clearly says that he breaks his oaths.

And on top of that, he seems like he's in some sort of weird frenzy.

[Be careful Fran, he's pretty strong.]

(Nn.)

[Urushi, make sure you hide in Fran's shadow until you find a good opportunity to sneak attack him.]

(Woof!)

He lived up to his stats. He noticed Fran the moment she jumped out at him, and immediately got ready for combat.

"Name yourself!"

Fran didn't reply to his question.

"Kuh! Name yourself you coward!"

"Hah!"

Fran ignored his words and continued to attack, but he managed to skillfully repel her strikes using his sword and shield.

“Nuryaaaaa!”

“Ha!”

He even managed to retaliate. Fran’s Divine Sword Arts were a higher level than his, but his shield rendered defenses solid. It was fairly obvious that he had way more combat experience than her too. It wasn’t someone she’d be able to completely smash.

It seems like we ran into a formidable opponent in a place that we never would’ve thought it. We would probably be able to beat him without much issue if either Urushi or I launched any sort of surprise attack, but I’d prefer to keep him alive if possible. He was pretty skilled, so I was pretty sure we wouldn’t lose out completely by keeping him alive. At the very least, we could use him to gain more information.

[Fran, try not to kill him if you can.]

(Nn. Understood.)

CHAPTER 89

THE TWINS' IDENTITY

Fran and the Dark Knight traded blow for blow. They repeatedly smashed their blades against each other and sent sparks flying throughout the slave traders' hideout. The clash of blade on blade rang throughout the building, but Silence prevented even the slightest bit of sound from leaking outside.

“Nuooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!”

“Hah!”

The duel was being dragged out. Neither Fran nor the dark knight could really gain an edge on the other. The status quo was nothing but a standstill – which only made sense. Both parties were swordsmen that had awakened to the divine arts, after all.

Alright, I guess I'd better make him drop his sword.

“Ha!”

“Argh!?”

I used Vibrating Impact and Thunder Blade right as I came into contact with his blade. As expected, the sudden shock made the man's hands go numb; he couldn't help but drop his sword.

But he didn't give up.

He immediately raised his shield and began to chant a spell.

“Dark Arrow!”

Not that it mattered. We were completely immune to dark, so the arrow phased out before it hit us.

“Impossible!”

“Opening.”

“Guah!”

The man let out a shout as he flinched in surprise, and created an opening far too obvious for Fran to miss. She immediately turned her blade and smashed his legs with its flat. She then pointed my blade at the back of the man’s neck as he fell onto one knee.

And that was that. The man had lost, and so, he looked up at Fran with a face full of frustration.

“How regrettable.”

“Who?”

“A man who sees no reason to give his name to the likes of you.”

You know, he’s pretty energetic for a middle aged man. Oh well, either way, it’s time to rough him up a bit so we can get some info out of him.

[Urushi, out.]

“Growl growl!”

“W-what!?”

Heh. Looks like he’s pretty spooked. I was about to get the interrogation going, but the children came up from the basement just as I was about to suggest cutting off one of his arms. All seven peeked in from the stairwell, with the two noble-like twins at the forefront.

Well, I guess it only made sense. We’d left them in the basement, so they probably started feeling anxious. Thankfully, the battle had already come to an end.

“Stay back. Not safe.”

They fearfully stopped in their tracks as Fran warned them. The male twin’s face,

however, suddenly twisted as he caught sight of the dark knight.

“Salrut!”

“My Prince! I see that you are unscathed!”

Wait what? That kid was a prince? The fuck?

“You came to save us...?”

“Princess! I am glad that you too are well!”

Huh? Wait, so he wasn’t one of the slave traders? Errr, I guess we should heal him up then or something.

Ten minutes passed by in the blink of an eye as we got up to pace.

We healed the knight and had him explain what was going on.

“Really a prince and princess?”

“Veritably. The prince and princess that stand before you are members of the Fyrias Kingdom’s royal family. They are sixth and seventh in line for the throne respectively.”

“And you? Guard?”

“Precisely.”

“Came to help because royal family was kidnapped?”

“I-It is as you say.”

Apparently what happened was that the prince and princess sneaked out and got themselves abducted. Naturally, the guards hadn’t any knowledge of it — until they realized they couldn’t locate them, that is. I actually kinda pitied the knight. It seemed like he was probably going to end up taking all the blame.

“How despicable those accused criminals were! They even went as far as to put something like *that* around the highness’ necks!”

Yeah... it does seem pretty bad for members of the royal family to be stuck with slave collars around their necks. In fact, the knight might not be able to keep his head on his shoulders for much longer given the current circumstances.

"I never would have suspected that they the traders would attempt to enslave children of such a tender age... Young lady, I must offer you my gratitude. I would not have been able to retrieve the prince or princess with such ease if not for your noble actions."

"Only did it for myself."

"Even so, my gratitude remains unchanged, for it was you that rescued my lieges. I would, however, like for you to answer but a single query. Whatever happened to the traders? I see not even their corpses."

"Cleaned up."

"By what means? There numbered far more than just a few."

"Nn? Skill."

"What exactly... No, please do not mind the question any longer. It is but rude to inquire the details of another's skills."

"Nn."

"I am more than willing to believe your words given that I have witnessed your abilities."

I was pretty grateful he acted the way he did. He ignored Fran's age in respect of her strength and treated her as an equal.

This was a stark contrast from how he treated all the slaves we just freed as well... children. To the knight, the other children were people he was obligated to protect.

[We should probably get out of here soon. There should still be a few more slave traders, and they might be coming back soon.]

"Nn."

[It'd be a pain in the ass if we ran into them on our way out, so let's get rid of all their collars while we're at it.]

Fran easily removed all the children's slave collars by overwriting the enslavement spell with a blank contract of her own, much like I did to her when we just met.

Every single last person in the room, Salrut included, looked at Fran with expressions of shock on their faces. Evidently, they weren't expecting the collars to come off nearly as easily as they did. The shock took a while to sink in, but once it did, their expressions began to change into those of joy.

Made sense though. Their fates were about take a cruel a turn as possible. They were about to become slaves, targets of abuse. But now, they were free. Their collars were gone, and they were no longer at risk of being sold off as merchandise.

"How impressive. To think that you would even be well versed in the art of contract magic!"

"Nn."

"Once again, I thank you."

Salrut paused for a moment before continuing.

"I wish not to say this as one who has received nothing but your assistance, however, I believe it is my duty to inform you that it would be better for you not to reveal your ability to use contract magic in any other sort of public setting."

"Why?"

"Contract magic is rare, and contract magic powerful enough to undo a slave contract can only be said to be all the more scarce. The only individuals that could possibly possess such high level contract magic would be none other than summoners and slave traders."

Ah, I get it. If you've got high level contract magic, then people would probably assume you were associated with the slavery business. Slaver merchants were disliked by the general public, even if they weren't the underground kind that went about kidnapping

people.

“My understanding is that you are a summoner, but that interpretation may not be one shared by all.”

Salrut’s gaze shifted over to Urushi. He was currently sprawled on all fours in his more dog-like form. He was in his normal form just a few minutes ago, but we had him shrink because the kids were getting scared of him. Salrut’s interpretation of the situation was most likely that Fran was a summoner that just so happened to know how to use a sword.

“Should leave soon.”

“An excellent point to make.”

“In that case, why don’t we seek shelter at the hotel we’ve rented? We shall leave everything that comes after to you, Salrut.”

“Yes, my prince!”

It seemed that the prince was offering to have everyone stay at the hotel he had reserved. It was a pretty good idea. Any hotel with royalty in it was pretty much bound to have good security. Thinking about it, the reason we couldn’t find any decent inns was probably because of the sudden influx of people like the prince here. They all had guards and maids and stuff, so they’d needed to book more rooms than the average person.

Fran, Urushi and Salrut guarded the children as they made their way over to the inn.

I figured the twins would be all cocky and pretentious, but it turned out that they were decent people despite being royalty. They weren’t anything like the shit-brained nobles I was expecting them to be. They went out of their way to make sure that the other children were doing okay even though they were all commoners. They also made sure to take the lead as we walked towards the inn in order to abate the other children’s fears. Though they were both just kids, they were still performing their royal duties to the best of their abilities.

Though I guess they do still have a few childlike aspects, seeing how they snuck out without telling anyone and whatnot. That said, they spent the rest of the trip in relative

silence, so I assumed they were most likely reflecting on their actions.

A bit of time passed, and we eventually arrived in front of a super luxurious looking inn. A single glance told me that it was the kind that typically only served the nobility. In fact, just seeing it made me feel like apologizing to the prince and his party. Yeap, it is definitely not their fault we weren't able to find a place to stay. I mean, I know we were trying to look for something a bit higher end, but this? This was way out of scope.

The children were all staring wide eyed in surprise as well.

The hotel's gatekeeper stared at us with a suspicious look on his face, but, he didn't bother saying anything and ended up letting us through.

"What are you standing there for? Come in."

"Feel free to enjoy your stay."

The prince and princess encouraged the other children to accompany them inside. After a bit of persuasion, they obliged and timidly followed the twins to the entrance.

"Well if it isn't the prince. Welcome back to our humble lodging."

We were greeted by the inn's staff despite the fact that it was already really late into the night. On second thought though, I guess we should've expected it. We're travelling with royalty, after all.

"And who would these children happen to be?"

"Simply put, a few things happened. Could you please prepare them rooms alongside hot water? I believe they will need baths."

"Well..."

"Naturally, I will pay for their accommodations. You should be able to fulfill this request of mine, correct?"

"We apologize for any inconvenience that may cause. We are fully aware of how unreasonable our request may appear."

“I doubt this will lead to any sort of complication. We’ll get everything ready immediately.”

Huh, you know, I don’t know what I should’ve expected. He really was a prince. He was able to deal with the inn’s staff without much issue despite the fact that they were adults and he wasn’t. The princess, on the other hand, had acted and apologized in a more modest, understanding manner. Having the two work together like that kind of made it seem like they were applying some form of the carrot and stick principle.

“Whatever is this fuss about?”

“Good evening Serid. I’ve just returned.”

“Ah, if it isn’t the prince. I was quite concerned over your safety.”

“Thank you. I apologize for the trouble. Unfortunately, I failed to navigate the city’s streets and lost my way.”

“You lost your way, you say?”

“Indeed. I was only just able to return because Salrut had managed to discover my location.”

Naturally, the prince didn’t make even the slightest mention of getting caught and collared by slave traders.

“I see. And who exactly are these children? Did you perhaps choose to purchase yourself a group of slaves?”

“That would be incorrect. There are mere helpers, so to speak. They assisted me in navigating the city’s streets.”

“I see. In that case, your business with them should be over, should it not? You lot, leave this place immediately once you receive your payment.”

The man speaking to us looked like your typical, stuck up, piece of shit noble. He glared at us and the children in nothing but scorn.

“Serid! They are guests here, shut your mouth immediately.”

“What!? Prince, I shan’t accept that. Whatever are you thinking? Associating with these filthy peas-”

“Serid. I told you to be quiet. These children are my benefactors.”

“Tsk...”

Hah! Serves you right you piece of shit chamberlain! The twins are on our side, bitch!

Serid made one more hateful glare before turning around and leaving.

“Sorry about that. He’s pretty capable, but he lacks the ability to be flexible at times like these.”

“Don’t care.”

The children didn’t really seem to mind all that much either. Most nobles were like that, so they were used to it.

“What are your plans? You are more than free to stay the night if you wish.”

Salrut turned towards us with a generous offer.

[Sounds pretty good to me. I mean, it’s more than just a step up from a shabby little place that doesn’t even have a bath.]

“Nn. Will be in your care.”

“Splendid! I shall have a room prepared for you immediately after I inform the prince of this joyous matter.”

And so, we ended up spending a night at a super high class inn, all thanks to the prince.

CHAPTER 90

ISN'T IT PRETTY EASY TO ACCIDENTALLY INGEST THE POISON YOU KEEP IN YOUR MOLARS?

We were provided an extravagant meal despite the fact that we arrived in the middle of the night. We, as guests, were presented with a rich, seafood soup, loads of soft buttered breads, and a massive chicken steak. And to top it all off, they prepared it so quickly that it was ready by the time Fran finished with her bath. Naturally, the children we rescued were also provided the exact same treatment.

Being subjected to all this really ingrained in me the fact that the inn was truly high class than anything else we'd ever experienced.

As a former middle aged man myself, I couldn't help but think the meal to be a bit on the heavy side, but it seemed like it ended up being just right given how hungry the children were. They actually started out rather hesitant, but soon began to eat with as much vigour.

The twins continued to show their concerns throughout the meal. They asked each kid in turn if they had a place to call home. If the answer was a yes, they would promise to make arrangements for their safe return. If the answer was a no, they would promise to make sure that nothing bad would happen to them going forward. I honestly had a hard time believing that they were only 13 years old. They were way too mature for their ages.

What's more was that both ended up lowering their heads to Fran in appreciation without so much as the slightest bit of unwillingness. Seeing the two of them act in the exact same manner at the exact same time really reinforced the idea that they were twins.

Immediately afterwards, the two introduced themselves in further detail. The prince was named Flut, and the princess Satia.

Fran seemed to take a liking to both of them, and happily answered all their questions, albeit in her usual, curt manner. Seeing her act like that put a smile on my face. To my knowledge, this was pretty much the first time Fran had ever gotten along with anyone

else in her age group. And as far as my opinion went, that alone was more than enough to make this whole ordeal well worth it.

Fran's room was a large and luxurious one bedroom suite the likes of which I'd never seen in person, not even in my past life. The chamber was decorated with a glamorous chandelier, a huge canopy, and even a ridiculously soft carpet. Seeing all these luxuries in person really made me wonder how much a night here would cost.

Oh what the hell! Both Fran and Urushi immediately dived straight into the bed! If we damaged or dirtied it, we'd probably end up paying compensation out the ass. In fact, I couldn't even fathom its price.

Though, I do get where they were coming from. Even I wanted to try sleeping in it.

"Night."

"Woof."

[Good night.]

And this is Master here, reporting in from the super luxurious inn's attic in order to bring you details directly from the scene of the crime.

A single individual had infiltrated the premises, and was creeping around atop the building whilst concealing his presence. The assassin was dressed in all black. It didn't look like he'd noticed me as of yet.

I cast Silence before knocking him unconscious with a bit of wind magic. I then captured him alive and brought him back over to Fran's room.

[So I caught this assassin dude sneaking around on the rooftop.]

"Big catch."

[Well, first, we should probably find out who he's working for. We'll hand him over to the prince after I guess.]

"Nn."

The assassin we captured was human, so he probably didn't have anything to do with the underground slave traders we busted earlier in the night. Oh well, whatever. We decided to hear what he had to say in either case. He might actually have something to do with the slave traders despite not being a member of the blue cat tribe.

Fran smacked the man in the face a few times to wake him up.

"Huh...? What...?"

"Awake?"

"W-What!? What did you do to me!?"

"Knocked out. Tied up."

"When...!?"

"Few things to ask. Honest answers, less pain."

"Growl growl growl."

The man was currently stuck in a situation where he was bound by magic thread with a sword pointed to his face. To make matters worse, there was even a giant wolf staring him down.

He probably immediately understood that there was nothing he could do given his current circumstances.

"—tsk"

[Woah! He just poisoned himself.]

He must've had some poison hidden away in one of his molars. You know, isn't keeping poison in your teeth kind of dangerous? I imagine it'd be pretty easy to swallow on accident. Or do they like go out of their way to practice not swallowing it or something?

Oh well, in either case, the man's status changed. He was now badly poisoned, so it

looked like he drank something pretty potent.

[Middle Heal.]

“Antidote.”

But all his effort went to waste. We had the perfect way to counteract his attempted suicide, and so we executed it. We rid his body of poison while restoring his HP back up to full.

“Too bad. Won’t work.”

“Impossible...! You managed to completely nullify my deadly poison!?”

“Good at healing.”

“Ugh...”

He didn’t give up and immediately bit his tongue off.

“Middle Heal.”

“Shit!”

“Like pain?”

In the end, the assassin told us everything he knew. It looked like he was prepared to die, but getting tortured ad infinitum was far outside what he could handle.

It turned out that he wasn’t connected to the slave traders in any which way. He was a freelance assassin who’d accepted a request to end both the prince and princess. He didn’t know who the request came from, but he was provided a set of instructions on how he could best infiltrate the inn.

He was paid fully in advance, and as a result, he didn’t know much about the person who made the request.

[Well, none of that information really pertained to us at all.]

“Nn.”

[Let's hand him over to Salrut.]

“Urushi, keep watch.”

“Woof!”

Fran quickly called Salrut over. Though it was almost dawn, the knight yet to go to sleep. It looked like he'd been keeping watch all night.

“So this man is the assassin of which you speak?”

“Nn.”

Salrut questioned the assassin some more. The man already completely given up, so he pretty much answered every question he could. He didn't bother lying either.

“Hm... I can see that you seem to be speaking the truth, which leaves me to question the culprit's identity.”

Salrut sank into a momentary bout of silence as he contemplated the assassin's words. Chances were, he was probably considering a bunch of possible culprits, most of which we'd probably never even heard of.

“There is still much for me to consider, and as such, I will be taking this man into custody.”

“Nn.”

“I shall discuss this topic with you in more detail some time tomorrow. I will further ensure that you are appropriately compensated for your actions. Please do look forward to it.”

“More interested in breakfast.”

“Hahaha! In that case, please enjoy it to your heart's content.”

Fran quickly went to bed and didn't wake up until sometime in the afternoon, after

which she promptly to began the ever so difficult endeavor of eating both breakfast and lunch at the same time. Everyone that caught sight of the act was left with an expression of nothing but pure shock. She stuffed her cheeks with so much food that it almost made her seem more like a squirrel or hamster than a cat.

In fact, she ate so fast that it almost seemed like she was stuffing food into her dimensional storage as opposed to her throat. Witnessing her in the act made Salrut so surprised that his eyes turned as round as could be.

“So, Fran, did you happen to have any sort of schedule in mind?”

“Nn?”

“Were you headed to any sort of particular destination?”

“Mmmphrphmm”

“Um... I apologize. I’ll wait until you’ve finished your meal.”

“Nnyu.”

All in all, Fran managed to devour about ten people’s worth of food, a truly impressive amount. The prince seemed rather surprised, but he promptly spoke up again the moment she finished eating.

“I remember you saying you were on a journey, but I don’t really think you told me any more than just that. Are you planning to go somewhere specific?”

“Nn. Ulmutt.”

“By ship, I presume?”

“Nn. Via Barbra.”

“I see... So have you already arranged for boat tickets? I’m fairly certain that they’re all sold out by now given the number of people heading over for the Lunar Banquet.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Barbra’s Lunar Festival is one of Kranzel’s biggest.”

“It gets even livelier there than it does in the capital.”

The princess interjected with a knowing smile.

Huh, I had no idea. I guess that means we probably won’t be able to head to Barbra for a few days. I really should’ve figured that out ahead of time though, especially after seeing how flooded all the inns were. Man, I really wanted to have Fran be a part of it too. It was one of the country’s biggest festivals, so I really didn’t want her to miss out.

“Didn’t know.”

“Well, there is a way for you to find yourself a ship though.”

“Nn?”

“We’d like to offer you a position as a guard, at least until we reach Barbra.”

“Naturally, we’ll pay you for your work. We’re planning on attending the banquet ourselves, so it goes without saying that we will arrive on time.”

We probably wouldn’t be able to find ourselves any decent ships if we went looking this late, and it’d be quite pitiable for Fran to have to part with her newfound friends after spending so little time with them. Besides, the prince’s ship was bound to be fairly luxurious, so all in all, I’d say we were offered a pretty sweet deal.

“Our biggest concern are the magic beasts we may encounter on our way.”

“Even with the knights?”

Apparently, a large magic beast had recently been spotted near the coast. Normally, the prince wouldn’t be concerned over magic beasts and the like, the one described in the reports was so enormous that it rendered him anxious.

And thus, he decided that more guards were necessary, and what better candidate was there than Fran? She was stronger than Salrut, and felt no fear even in the face of an assassin.

“Your highness, with all due respect, I’d like to request that you rescind your prior request! I simply cannot acknowledge you hiring her, we know nothing of her background!”

The prince’s chamberlain, Serid, couldn’t seem to stand for the thought of being in Fran’s presence for much longer, as he immediately raised his voice and began to furiously protest the prince’s decision.

But in the end, he was silenced. The prince glared at him, so he was given no choice but to sit his ass down and bear with his frustrations. That said, it didn’t take long for him to begin peering over in our direction with a threatening look in his eyes.

(Master, accept?)

Sweet! Looks like Fran’s pretty eager to do this.

[Why not? We get our boat tickets, so I see no problems.]

“Nn. Job accepted.”

“Many thanks. We’ll be counting on you.”

And so, we ended up deciding to escort the prince and princess to their destination.

CHAPTER 91

A WHOLE NEW WORLD... OF FISHING

The weather was great. The sea was a beautiful shade of blue. The skies were clear, and the few clouds that remained were as white as marshmallows. Despite being a sword, I could almost feel the sun's powerful ultraviolet rays assaulting my skin as the salty sea breeze gently passed by. This, *this* was what it truly meant to be at sea.

Fran, Urushi and I were currently aboard an incredibly luxurious ship, and I didn't mean luxurious in the sense that it was a massive cruise liner or anything. In fact, it wasn't all that big at all. However, its insides were decorated in as gaudy a manner as could be. All in all, it was probably at about the same level of luxury as the inn from which we just departed. Honestly though, I should've seen this coming. I don't know what else I should've expected of a ship reserved for royalty.

Fran was enjoying this opportunity to its fullest. She was sitting on a wooden chair atop the ship's deck and basking in the sun to her heart's content. Her mind and body were both clearly in vacation mode, as evidenced by the glass of juice sitting next to her.

That said, she was still making sure the ship was getting all the protection it needed... by ordering Urushi to do it in her place. Speaking of which, Urushi was currently on his way back to the ship. He had just defeated a fish-like magic beast, and was in the midst of retrieving it.

Urushi could leap through the air as he pleased and fire off dark magic instead of relying on melee combat, so he didn't really end up getting soaked or anything. The only part of him that actually got wet was his face because he had to stick it into the water to pick up the magic beasts he defeated.

Well, the way I just said it made it sound kind of like Fran was doing nothing at all, but she was in fact still exerting a slight bit of effort from time to time. She would start casting spells if more than one magic beast attacked the ship simultaneously.

"Woof woof!"

“Welcome back Urushi.”

[I’ll cut it up and stuff so we can eat it later.]

“Woof!”

[Y’know, I’m pretty content. I’ve managed to get quite a few magic stone points out of this.]

We’d only been on the boat for about half a day, but we’d already managed to kill 11 different magic beasts. Four kills belonged to Fran, and the other seven to Urushi.

The ship’s crew had all been glaring at her in annoyance just earlier this morning as a result of her seemingly laid back attitude. They did warm up to her eventually though, as evidenced by the fact that they even went out of their way to thank her. Apparently, this was the first time they’d ever come across this many magic beasts without their ship being subjected to damage.

Serid was a bit more vocal about his complaints, but seeing Fran in action had left him with nothing to say with regards to her performance.

He didn’t stop trying to call her out though. I mean seriously, he was annoying as could be and pissed me the hell off on more than one occasion. During meal times, he wouldn’t shut up about how Fran didn’t have manners. She quickly got annoyed as well, so she activated Court Etiquette and put on a display as perfect as could be. Though Serid was still frustrated, he ultimately ran out of valid complaints and so, he ended up just sitting there and glaring at us in vexation. Observing him led me to believe that he and Salrut weren’t on good terms. We were quite friendly with Salrut, so he had likely identified us as a sort of natural enemy.

(Master. Afternoon snack.)

[Alright. Are you craving anything in particular?]

(Nnnn... Cookies.)

I hadn’t really made many sweets myself yet, so I decided to hand Fran the cookies we bought in Alessa. They came from a shop that sold most of its merchandise to nobles, so they were pretty tasty. That said, I personally still preferred the sweets we had back

on earth. I should really sit down some time in the near future so I can mass produce stuff like cakes and pudding.

“Tasty.”

“Whine whine.”

[Don’t you worry Urushi, I’ve got something for you too.]

“Woof!”

All the magic beasts we ran into were pretty weak, so both Fran and Urushi ended up being fairly relaxed. We sure did land ourselves one hell of a job. It felt like there were far more benefits than there was actual work.

There weren’t any other magic beasts for a while, so we spent a bit of time just dilly dallying around. That, however, changed once the princess came looking for us. As she approached, I couldn’t help but notice her long, blonde hair as it blew in the wind reflected the sun’s golden rays. Her blue eyes and westerner-like facial features were quite appealing to the eye. As of right now, she had a sort of cute charm, but as she matured, she would likely end up more on the beautiful side of the scale. ^[1]

Her features were a stark contrast to Fran’s, not to say that Fran wasn’t cute. She definitely was, it was just that she had short black hair and deep black eyes. It was like she was the princess’ opposite, and seeing them next to each other was kind of like seeing the sun next to the moon.

“Good afternoon Fran. We about to go fishing, would you like to join us?”

“Nn. Will join.”

After receiving the princess’s invitation, Fran followed her to the ship’s rear deck. There, we found Prince Flut, accompanied by three of the children we rescued. The girl and two boys by his side were the kids that didn’t have anywhere to go. The prince had proclaimed their encounter a sort fate, and decided that he would hire them all as servants.

The children had seemed to want to get to work right away, but the prince told them to treat him as just another one of their peers for the time being, seeing as they had

yet to officially begin their training. The four of them seemed to be having a pretty good time, they were happily chatting away whilst holding their fishing rods in hand.

Children were unlike adults in the sense that they had yet to learn to discriminate between social classes, so it didn't take for them to befriend both the prince and princess. The Serid faggot was already starting to get all bitchy again, but everyone more or less ended up ignoring him.

"Are you going to fish too, Fran?"

"Nn. Good at it."

"Oh? Really?"

"Alright, then let's have a fishing contest!"

"And we can all eat the fish we catch together!"

Fran was given a really fancy fishing rod. It was such an incredibly high quality product that it even had an automatic, magical reel.

The kids we saved didn't seem to realize the item's value, and happily just lobbed their lines into the sea without so much as a second glance. It didn't take long for them to start landing fish. The fish that were reeled in were pretty much limited to sardine and marakel lookalikes, but regardless, the children soon began joyously comparing the size and relative rarities of their catches. Even the princess was all smiles despite the fact that she herself had opted to sit off to the side and observe as opposed to joining in.

The only one that had yet to catch anything was Fran, and as a result, the other children, the prince included, soon began to tease her.

"Whatever happened to being good at fishing?"

"You're the only one that hasn't caught anything yet."

"Even I managed to land three!"

"Don't worry! We'll make sure we share some of ours with you."

“Just wait. Ignoring small fry. Will net big catch.”

“Hahahaha! Good luck!”

I didn't really see any problems with just going about this whole fishing thing like a normal person would, but Fran had insisted on trying to land something big.

The bait she was using was a Rockworm, a weak magic beast that we happened to have lying around. They didn't really have use normally. Their shells would get all fragile when dried, and their meat stank and tasted like crap. The only part of them that we even bothered taking note of was their magic stones. It was kind of sad, but they normally only really saw use as compost. As a result, I happened to have a bunch sitting around in my storage just taking up space for no real reason.

Fran had taken one of the aforementioned Rockworms and chopped about a meter off its body. She then placed that severed section on a massive fishing hook and threw it out to sea. Using bait like that really limited what she could catch. The only things she could lure in were sharks, whales, and magic beasts. Thinking about it really made me wonder what she'd been trying to catch in the first place — not that it was of any real consequence. The only thing that really mattered was that she was having fun, which she was.

The status quo didn't really change even after an hour. Each of the children had managed to fish up ten or so different fish, but Fran had yet to catch anything.

At first, they'd teased her about being unable to catch anything, but their expressions had gradually changed over the course of the activity. They'd even started hoping that she would soon land a bite. They seemed to have the wrong idea. They thought that her silence and lack of an expression was due to something along the lines of idea, when really, that was just how she was.

Fran actually didn't mind her lack of a catch at all. In fact, she was rather happy as a result of the peaceful atmosphere.

But then it finally happened. The atmosphere crumbled in an instant as the moment Fran had been awaiting finally arrived.

“Nn!”

“Nice! You got a bite!”

“Woah, it’s pulling super hard!”

“It must be really big!”

The children started cheering. They seemed as happy as they were when they themselves got bites.

The fishing rod started to bend out of shape. Despite being what was likely one of the highest quality fishing rods in the world, it was forced to bend as far as it could go. Chances were that Fran had probably caught something on the scale of a marlin.

“Mgrrhhhh!”

“You can do it! Go go!”

“Reel it in! Reel it in!!”

“Nn!”

Fran was using every last bit of her strength to pull the fish in, but her prey was pulling back with just as much force. Despite her efforts, the reel continued to spin and the line continued to lengthen. Seeing her like that reminded me of a show I saw on TV once. If I recall correctly, it was called Fishing the Seven Seas... or something like that.

“Nnnnnn!!!!”

“Keep it up!”

“Don’t let it get away!”

To be honest, I probably could’ve given Fran a hand. I could’ve weakened it a bit without catching anyone’s attention. It would’ve been pretty easy to tire it out with magic and make it feel all drowsy or something.

But I refrained.

This was Fran's battle, something she should take care of on her own.

Fran struggled with the fish for more than thirty minutes. Obvious signs of exhaustion had started to show on her face.

The process had ultimately ended up as something more akin to trawling than fishing. She merely pulled her catch along as the ship continued to sail.

Her arms had already started to go numb, so she gave up on winning with nothing but brute force and instead relied on her skills.

She began by activating Thunder Blade. The expensive fishing rod was instantly cloaked in a coat of electricity. She then quickly used water magic alongside current control, and started to pull her prey towards the ship whilst activating Herculean Strength and a whole bunch of different support spells. She was going for one last spurt.

It took her ten minutes to finally drag the fish from the ocean's depths. Its form wasn't fully visible, but we could see a giant, ten meter long shadow lurking beneath the water's surface. The fish she'd caught was literally twice Urushi's size.

"Wow! What is that!?"

"W-Wow Fran! Are you okay?"

"Holy moly!"

The children immediately kicked up a fuss, but Fran paid them no heed as she continued to singlemindedly reel her prey in. The air around her would periodically crackle with electricity because she had kept Thunder Blade active the whole time.

That said, the fish had really put up one hell of a struggle. There was no way it was just a normal fish. Knowing that, I decided to give it a quick appraisal.

General Information

Race: Dreadnought Destroyer (Tuna)
Magic Beast (Fish)
Level 29

HP: 556
MP: 139
STR: 207
VIT: 139
AGI: 109
INT: 56
MGC: 77
DEX: 69

Skills

Hardened Skin: Lv 6
Current Control: Lv 6
Water Magic: Lv 5
Swimming: Lv 5
Enhanced Sense of Smell
Strengthened Shell

Description

Its head is covered with a substance as hard as mithril. Its name is derived from the fact that it can destroy battleships by ramming them with its skull. It is classified as a D level threat if within the ocean, and an E level threat under all other conditions. Its flesh is said to be an extremely luxurious delicacy. Its magic stone is in its head.

[Watch out Fran. It's a magic beast, and a pretty strong one at that.]

"Nn!"

Fran immediately hit the Dreadnought Destroyer with a mix of wind magic and sheer brute force; its body was sent flying up into the air.

"Woah!!"

"Kyah!"

"Holy!"

The giant magic beast immediately fell towards the ship and caused both the children and sailors to scream in panic.

[The ship will probably take a lot of damage if you let the Tuna fall on top of it.]

“Nn.”

Fran immediately used magic detection to find the giant fish’s magic stone and threw me at it with all her might.

“Haa!”

She accelerated me even further through the use of wind magic, so I pierced through the fish’s hard skull with ease.

She then cast more wind magic and caught its corpse before it crashed into the ship. She then gently laid it on the deck. The fish was at least twelve meters long from head to tail. In fact, it was so long that its tailfin actually hung off the side of the ship; its length was greater than our luxury liner’s width.

“Fishing contest. My win.”

“Er... Um...”

“That uh...”

“Nn?”

Fran began dismantling the fish despite the fact that the children and crew were still in the midst of a confused uproar. Well, I say dismantle, but all she really did was cut off its head and fillet it.

[Fran, what are you doing?]

(Promised to share.)

[Oh, yeah. Right.]

And so, Fran continued to quickly and efficiently dismantle the giant fish. The sailors hadn’t been aware at how proficient she was at dismantling, so they couldn’t help but end up staring in awe.

I’ve emphasized this multiple times already, but the fish really was massive. In fact, it was so big that we could probably feed over a hundred people with just the delicious

fatty stomach part itself. That thought was probably precisely why the ship's crew had yet to calm down. They were probably all excited because of the fact that there was a massive amount of a super high class delicacy right before their eyes.

They continued to make a fuss throughout the dismantling process. Silence didn't come until quite a bit after Fran put the head and bones away inside her dimensional storage.

"I knew that Fran was strong, but I never would have fathomed that she would be *this* strong..."

"Hahaha! You've beat me by a mile. The fishing content belongs to you."

"How incredible! She really is much stronger than Salrut!"

"Delicious!"

"S-So this is how a Dreadnought Destroyer tastes..."

"I'm going to eat a whole lifetime's worth!"

The ship soon started to get noisy again as we started handing out cuts of tuna. We gave the sailors a share as well, so the whole ship was soon filled with a sort of party like atmosphere. Everyone was happy, which made sense. It wasn't everyday that you'd get your hands on a delicacy this delicious, after all.

"Hey, thanks for the meal."

Even the captain came up to offer us his thanks.

"My name is Rengil. Would you mind me asking yours?"

"Fran."

"And I assume you're an adventurer?"

"Nn. Rank D adventurer."

Fran flashing her guild card caused the ship to stir with noise yet again. Very few had

ever achieved D rank at an age as young as hers.

“I expected nothing less. In fact, I was expecting you to be of a higher rank given your abilities. I was quite surprised that you managed to defeat Dreadnought Destroyer with such ease. In any case, I would like to offer you a token of appreciation.”

Captain Rengil took something out of his chest pocket and handed it to Fran.

“What’s this?”

“That coin right there has the Luciel Conglomerate’s coat of arms engraved on it. The company’s head office is in Barbra, and showing them that coin should earn you quite a few conveniences going forward.”

“The Luciel Conglomerate is one of Kranzel’s leading corporations, and evidently, one of its executives has just taken a liking to you. How truly impressive!”

The prince explained that the coin we’d received was actually something really worthwhile, as it meant that a massive company had our backs. I really had to give it to the captain. He had a pretty good eye for adventurers.

“You sure?”

“Of course. In fact, I’d say it’s worth very little compared to what we would obtain out of networking with an adventurer with as much potential as you.”

The sailors began string up yet another storm the moment their captain finished speaking. This time around, all of them were praising Fran without the slightest bit of reserve.

“Man, she even managed to catch the captain’s eye.”

“Well yeah. Look at how young she is! She’s already rank D at *that* age!”

“She defeated the Dreadnought Destroyer with ease too.”

“And she’s cute.”

“Dude, what the hell!? You were a pedo!?”

“N-No way man! That’s not what I meant!”

“I would like to encourage you to visit our headquarters in Barbra at least once. It will be well worth your time.”

“Nn.”

The captain gave one last bow before turning around and heading back to his position. Likewise, the crew members passed by one by one and thanked Fran in turn. As a result, the three children ended up looking at her with gazes tainted with an ever so slight bit of envy.

“You’re amazing Fran!”

“Nn. Of course.”

“I’m going to become just as strong as you are!”

“Good luck.”

“Lemme see the coin!”

Fran’s finally made real friends! And she’s hanging out with them too!

Just seeing her like that made me wish that the moment would last in perpetuity.

But my hopes were crushed, as the sailor keeping watch immediately began to shout.

“P-Pirate ship spotted!!”

CHAPTER 92

SPECIAL ATTACK! MONOLITH BUSTER CRASH!

“P-Pirate ship spotted!!”

The ship’s crew began the panic the moment they heard the watchman’s shout. Likewise, the children immediately stopped eating and instead began looking around with anxious looks on their faces.

Seriously? Fuck those shit eating retards! Fran was just starting to relax and have fun! I was **NOT** going to let them get away with this.

The twins immediately went to go get the captain, who proceeded to explain the situation.

“It looks like we’re about to be attacked by a fleet of pirates”

“Fleet? How many?”

“Eight ships in total.”

Huh, that’s actually a pretty decent number.

“What do you think of our chances of breaking through and escaping?”

“I’m afraid it’s not possible. They’ve many a speedboat.”

“Then shall we fight?”

“With all due respect, your highness, I wish for you and your sister to board a lifeboat and escape.”

“Would it not be possible to fit us all on the aforementioned lifeboat?”

“We would fit, but most of us will need to stay behind in order to fight the pirates and thereby draw their attention. The plan is currently to have your highnesses escape

alongside the children and a few select others.”

“I refuse to to allow that to happen. I cannot allow myself to escape whilst making sacrifices of my retainers.”

“I too support my brother’s sentiments. We refuse to escape by ourselves.”

If I was still human, I likely would’ve nodded my head in approval. I liked the way the prince and princess thought. Normally, this kind of situation would resolve itself by having a few subordinates act as decoys while they escaped. In fact, I’d go as far as to say that escaping with their lives was precisely their duty as royalty. The only possible way to describe the two royals currently protesting that exact action was that they were naive.

But that was fine. I rather liked them, and I didn’t really think there was any sort of issue with royalty acting the way they did.

“I am also against the idea.”

“You too Serid? I see you understand the value in having us all escape together.”

“I am against that idea as well. My belief is that we would do best to surrender.”

“What!? You fool! How can you possibly even consider the idea of surrender!?”

Salrut roared in anger in response to Serid’s sudden suggestion.

“We cannot best them in combat.”

“And that is precisely why we should allow the prince and princess to escape while we buy them the time they require!”

“So you mean to say that you believe the two of them will be able to navigate the ocean and safely return home in nothing but a miniscule rowboat? It would be much more favourable to declare the highness’ identities and surrender. Pirates are crude, but it would be but nonsensical for them to go out of their ways to make enemies our country. I can assure that the pirates will not harm the prince nor princess, but instead, demand ransom as compensation for their safeties. There is no reason for us to resist. Resisting will do nothing more than anger our enemies and eliminate any potential

means for negotiation.”

His proposal did seem like it was supported by a decent amount of logic, but things probably wouldn’t go as smoothly as he thought they would.

“Your proposal is ridiculous! I refuse to acknowledge its viability.”

“Learn your place, Salrut. A mere knight like you has no right to participate in this conversation.”

“I am their highness’ guard. I have the right to act according to my discretion in times of need.”

“How impudent you are. Did you perhaps think that being promoted to their highness’ guard provides you the right to argue against *me*?”

“Impudence plays no part in this ordeal! My duty is but to protect, and that is precisely what I am attempting to do.”

“Silence foreigner! You are nothing, a mere dog picked up by the queen upon a whim! I have more than enough reason to doubt the truth of your words.”

“I see that you’ve stooped to the level of insults now, Serid.”

“And for what reason would I not? You are but encouraging a measure that would bring more risk to their highness’ than necessary. Truly, I have begun to doubt your motives. Did you *really* take flight from the Kingdom of Reidos? Is that but a pretense? A lie? Is it not possible, or rather, likely, for you to be merely aiming for our country’s Godblade? I think it so.”

“Godblade? In possession?”

Fran joined in on the conversation happening between the two old men because her ears caught something that grabbed her attention.

“I-Indeed. Our country is in possession of a single Godblade.”

“Don’t you dare call the Fyrias Kingdom your country, you damned Reidosian!”

“I dare you to repeat those words!”

And so, the two old men started arguing once again. Ew.

You know, thinking about it, aren't they like, kind of wasting a lot of time doing this?

[They're being a bit of a pain in the ass right, so what do you say to fixing their pirate problem, Fran? They'll probably tell us more about the Godblade if you ask later anyways.]

(Nn. Good idea.)

[Man, why did this have to happen in the middle of a meal anyways...]

(Sushi. Tasty.)

[Urushi, stay here and guard the prince and princess, alright?]

(Woof!)

(Save sushi. I want.)

(Bark!)

[Oh, did you end up taking a liking to it?]

(Nn. Only second to curry. Tasty.)

Welp, still doesn't match up to her beloved curry apparently.

“Wait, Fran, where are you going?”

“Nn? Sinking enemies.”

“What? Wait! You're acting far too recklessly!”

The prince tried to stop Fran by grabbing ahold of her, but she easily dodged and stepped up onto the ship's railing.

“Be right back.”

And with that line, she leapt.

“Kyaaa! Fran!”

“Fran!”

The children rushed up to the ship’s railing in haste. They’d assumed that she had dived into the ocean, but yeah, no. Not even Fran could board a pirate ship with ease if she had to swim up to it first. And that was why they didn’t see her swimming when they peeked over the deck. Instead, they were greeted by a rather peculiar sight. Fran was using magic to hop through the air.

“Woah!”

“That’s amazing!”

“Fran’s flying!”

I activated telekinesis and let her get on top of me. To the children, it looked as if she was surfing through the air.

It took us about thirty seconds to get up above the pirate ships. The flag they had raised was one with a skull inscribed upon it. In other words, the people we were about to fight were the pirate equivalent of basic bitches.

The only notable thing about the ships was that they had already sustained a fair amount of damage. It almost looked as if the pirates had just finished fighting another battle. One of the ships even had a giant hole in its side.

[The hell’s up with that?]

“Don’t know.”

[Oh well, whatever. They have their cannons prepped and stuff, so I guess can’t just ignore that one or anything.]

“Sink biggest last?”

[Sure, why not?]

“Nn. Starting now.”

[Er wait a sec, hold on. Why don't we actually try going for that one first?]

“Biggest?”

[Yeah, I want to check if that's the one their captain's on. I also want to ask them a few things before we sink them all.]

“Understood.”

And so, we ended up attacking the ship that looked like the flagship first. The pirates onboard could do nothing but stare at us with their mouths gaping as we readied our assault.

“Starting.”

[Go for it. Make sure you don't kill the captain though.]

“Nn.”

Fran leapt off of me, grabbed me on her way down, and immediately killed every pirate in her vicinity as she landed.

What happened afterwards was more or less a slaughter. Every single movement Fran made resulted in the death of a pirate. There were a few half decent fighters, but not a single one of them was even anywhere remotely close to a match for Fran. Their ranged options were completely nullified as well. None of the arrows or spells they loosed could pierce Fran's magic barrier.

“W-who the hell are you!?”

“Adventurer.”

“Shit! This is fucking insane!”

“Die bitch!”

“No.”

“Gyaaahhh!”

It took us but a few moments to defeat every single pirate aboard the ship save for the captain.

“Damned monster!”

Oh what the fuck. I hate this guy already.

(Master. Not content?)

[Well yeah. Just look at what he’s wearing.]

“Nn?”

What the hell kind of pirate was he supposed to be!? He didn’t have any eyepatches, he didn’t have any wooden limbs, and he didn’t have any hooks, like what the hell! He didn’t even have a goddamn hat with a goddamn skull on it either! He’s literally not even a real pirate. Like come on! I was hoping he would look like Captain Hook, or maybe even Jack Sparrow, but no! This little shit doesn’t look like a pirate at all! Like what the fuck was this!? I feel fucking scammed!

[He’s literally dressed the exact same as any run of the mill warrior!]

The captain was wearing normal plate armour with a normal helmet. There was nothing interesting about his appearance at all. Well, I mean he did at least have a cape, and his armour was pretty high quality, but he looked literally nothing like the captain of a crew of pirates. I never would’ve even guessed it to be him. The only reason I knew was because I used appraisal.

“Damn you! Let go of me! Let go of me right this instant!”

Fran lifted the pirate as I voiced my complaints. Seeing a cute, little girl like her lift a huge, bulky man was kind of off putting actually.

[Oh whatever... Let's just get the questioning and shit over with.]

(What to ask?)

[Ask him if he's the one that commands the whole fleet.]

And so, we began to interrogate the pirate. Fran asked the questions while I figured out whether or not they were true by running them through the Principle of Falsehood.

The results of our interrogation were as follows: he was the fleet's boss, they had a base with more guys there, and that they didn't have any treasure because they'd only just left.

I wanted to ask the captain a few more questions, but we ran out of time. The other nearby ships had begun bombarding the one we were on despite the fact that their captain was still alive. How heartless.

"Those sons of bitches betrayed me!"

I'm not sure what he expected. They'd probably just end up getting a new boss if he died anyways.

[Alright, let's go destroy all the other ships.]

"Nn."

"Gyuke!"

Fran gave the captain's neck a chop and knocked him unconscious. For some odd reason, he let out a really wierd noise as it happened. Moreover, his mouth had began to foam, and his eyes had completely rolled back into his head.

[The hell was that?]

"Nn? Cool effect. Good hit."

[Eh, oh well whatever. We can let him live if you want. Just like roll him up and bring him with us or something.]

“Nn. Going.”

A second bombardment assaulted us as Fran picked up the captain and got back on top of me. They seemed to be aiming at us, but they couldn't seem to hit because of how small of a target we were relative to what they were used to.

“Activating now.”

Fran activated her dimensional storage as she got above the other ships. This time, however, she wasn't actually putting anything inside of it. Quite the opposite, in fact. Remember those giant rocks we happened to pick up the other day?

[Fuahahaha! Take this! Monolith Buster Crash!]

(Nn?)

[Er, it's nothing. Don't worry about it.]

“Nn.”

The pirates were clearly thrown into a state of disorder. Well, can't really blame them. A rock the size of their ship literally just appeared out of thin air.

Doing this allowed us to get rid of the giant rocks we had sitting around for no reason while also sinking the enemy's ships in one go. It was truly an application of the classic two birds one stone concept.

Honestly, we probably could've just dumped the rocks in the ocean earlier, but doing that would've made it seem like I was illegally dumping garbage or something, so I felt kinda guilty about it despite the fact that I probably wouldn't have been reprimanded for it anyway. This, however, made me feel pretty good if anything.

The dull sound of wood being torn to shreds rang throughout the seas the moment the rock hit the ship. This sound was immediately followed by a louder, metallic impact and then finally a series of screams. And that was that. The ship snapped in half and sank into the ocean.

“Next?”

[Hell yeah!]

We did the same thing to the other ships as well. The pirates tried shooting us down with magic and arrows, but their shots were too scattered and failed to accomplish much of anything at all given that all their attacks were completely negated by Fran's magical barrier.

It took us less than five minutes to sink all eight pirate ships. Naturally, the flag ship was given the exact same treatment as the rest, and so, we managed to get rid of two thirds of the rocks we had in storage.

[Alright, that's that. Let's head back over to the ship.]

"Nn."

CHAPTER 93

SUSPICION

“Just how selfish can you possibly get!?”

Serid began to yell in his usual, loud manner the moment we got back to the ship.

“Nn?”

“What were you doing!? You attacked the enemy without awaiting even the slightest bit of consent!”

“No problem. Sank all enemies.”

“She does have a point. I fail to see any issue, Serid.”

“You fail to see any issue!? She engaged the enemy by her lonesome and thereby neglected her duty to protect the prince! That, *that* is the issue!”

It didn’t seem like he was going to be satisfied regardless of what Fran did. My guess was that he was likely acting like this in order to try to belittle her achievement or something.

“I will admit that you deserve some praise, as you accomplished the feat of sinking an entire fleet of pirates by your lonesome. However, the method you employed was nothing short of inconsiderate. Your assault caused wave after wave to batter our ship. We were sent into such a state of disarray that the vessel even capsized. We managed through the application of water based magics, but regardless, you very evidently put their highnesses in harm’s way!”

Okay, you know what? I take that back. I’ll admit I messed up. I never even considered that we might end up hitting our allies.

[We should probably apologize.]

“Nn. Sorry.”

“Hmph. I mind it not so long as you understand the consequences of your actions.”

Oh god damn it. Now he’s got this cocky look on his face. It really makes me want to hit him...

“Ugh...”

“Woke up?”

The pirate we brought back to the ship had awoken. All the excess noise Serid made had probably forced his unconscious mind back into the realm of sentience.

“W-What the!? Where the hell am I?”

“On ship.”

“What happened to my subordinates?”

“Sank.”

[So they’re dead in the water?]

“Nn.”

“Explain yourself! What exactly are the two of you discussing?”

Serid immediately yelled in an irritated tone as a result of the fact that Fran had started casually talking to the pirate.

“Is that one of the pirates?”

“Nn. Interrogating.”

“Then hand him over. This task will be mine. Guards!”

“Sir!”

A nearby soldier immediately adhered to Serid’s orders. He grabbed the pirate’s arm

and immediately lifted him to his feet. I didn't get what he was doing. Was he trying to steal all Fran's glory? And where was he going to move him?

"Taking him? Where?"

"I will bring him to my cabin for the purposes of interrogation. I forbid you all from joining me in the endeavor."

"I'll interrogate."

"You think I could possibly leave a task as important as this in *your* hands?"

Okay no. That made literally no sense at all. Firstly, he wasn't the one who captured the pirate, and secondly, he wasn't letting us so much as observe his interrogations. Like what the hell! I can't tell if this is just another form of harassment, or if he's going to ask about something that he didn't want the rest of us to hear. Either way, he was being overly suspicious.

Seeing his actions reminded me about the whole thing with the assassin. I was pretty sure that someone had helped the assassin sneak in, most notably someone with the power to sway the inn's guards to such an extent that they would create a sort of opening in their defense net. Moreover, it was a bit weird that the ship we were on didn't have any sort of escort. I know that we were currently aboard a vessel that prioritized speed and all that, but it really shouldn't have gone effortless given that we had royalty on board.

Thinking about it quickly made me realize that Serid probably had enough power to arrange both the aforementioned oddities.

Throwing more facts into the pool only made him seem even more suspicious. The only problem was that I didn't have any sort of evidence. We could just say that one of skills allowed us to see through lies, but, there wasn't any way for us to prove that we really had that skill, so it had no function as far as evidence went. We could torture him until he decided to confess his wrongdoings, but that wasn't exactly what I'd call the best evidence either.

Fran and Serid's underlings had began glaring at each other as I thought things through.

The situation was starting to look bad, but, the tense atmosphere was suddenly broken by the pirate as he let loose a fearless laugh.

“Hahahaha! Well, if it isn’t the Fyrias Kingdom’s chamberlain. Don’t think I don’t know exactly who you are, Serid.”

“W-What are you...”

“I may be a pirate, but I’m no fool. Even seafarers like us have more than enough of an intelligence network to figure out exactly who our clients are — regardless of whether or not said clients are landlubbers like you.”

Okay, woah. Did he just say that Serid was one of his clients? That’s not something I can just hear and leave be.

“E-Enough of your nonsense! Someone silence this madman immediately.”

One of Serid’s soldiers raised his blade, but Fran moved in between him and the pirate before he could swing it.

“Want to hear more.”

“He is but rambling! There is nothing to hear.”

“Will judge after hearing.”

“Are you perhaps attempting to frame me for colluding with the pirates? Unacceptable! Guards! Arrest her immediately!”

“Serid, what in the world are you thinking!?”

“I-I am but ordering the arrest of one who has committed the act of treason! She is attempting to frame me for collusion, of which I had no part! Do not interfere! I will ensure that the sin also falls upon your shoulders if you try to so much as assist her!”

That’s a nice excuse he’s got there.

It seemed that Serid was still underestimating Fran because of her appearance. He most likely thought she was a mage given the attacks he’d just witnessed, so he

probably assumed the soldiers could take her close combat.

“Drop swords in less than 10 seconds. Will forgive.”

“Y-You think you can beat us, little girl?”

“We have you surrounded! It’s your loss.”

Fran raised me and readied herself for combat, but Serid’s soldiers continued to look down on her despite that. They had stayed within the ship’s interior throughout the trip’s duration, so they knew little of her abilities and even less of Urushi’s. They had assumed that she had used spells or magic tools to crush the pirate ships, so they thought they could best her so long as they stopped her from chanting.

The prince, however, more than understood the extent of Fran’s strength. He was worried for the soldier’s lives, and so he quickly positioned himself in the middle of the encirclement. The expression he had on his face clearly indicated that he went in knowing the consequences, and that he was prepared for death should it come.

“Lower your swords, all of you! Serid, what sort of fool are you?”

“I am but subjugating a rebel, Your Highness.”

“You cannot best Fran. Soldiers, lower your swords lest you bear a deathwish.”

“Hah hah hah! What an intriguing joke, your highness. Do you truly believe that our country’s soldiers would lose to such a small, pathetic child?”

“I do!”

“Prince, I see that I must prove you wrong and reestablish your faith in our countrymen. The Fyrias Kingdom’s soldiers are men of valour, and now, they shall demonstrate that precise fact. It is but a shame that their foe is a mere girl.”

“C-Cease this right this instant!”

“Do not heed the prince’s orders! Do it!”

“Sir! Yes sir!”

The soldiers chose to obey Serid over the prince. They immediately rushed Fran down in order to attack. Their faces gave away that they weren't actually intent on killing her; at most, they wanted a limb or two. Moreover, their movements indicated that they were fairly proficient at combat.

"Can't be helped."

"Woof."

But they were no match for Fran, and so, the battle ended in an instant. Fran cut down two of them, I sent two more flying with magic, and Urushi pinned down another. All of the men that had opposed us had collapsed, save for Serid.

"I-Impossible... How could it be!"

Fran completely ignored the now stiffened up chamberlain and instead turned to face the pirate.

"Explain everything."

"I'll tell you whatever you want if you agree to let me live."

"Nn. Agreed. Will spare."

"Heh, alright. The deal is sealed."

"First. Involvement with Serid."

"He offered us a job. So basically, he's one of our clients."

"Shut your mouth immediately, you lia-"

"Shut up."

"Geh!"

Serid tried to cut the pirate off and stop him from talking, but Fran gave him a quick smack and knocked him out. Well, that's one less source of noise.

“And?”

“E-Er, right. It happened sometime in the evening two days ago.”

Apparently the pirates had a secret base set up somewhere in Dharz. They often used it to buy supplies and gather information. Someone had purposefully sought out said base in order to hire them for something.

Specifically, they were asked to attack the ship we were on. They were told that the Fryias Kingdom would have a few members of its royal family on the boat. Their job was to kidnap and murder those precise individuals. Moreover, arrangements would be made so that the ship would remain without any sort of armed escort, and it was even said that the people on board would surrender immediately.

“Client was Serid?”

“Yeah. It was one hell of a dirty job, but so we did a bit of investigating. Tracking the requestor informed us that he was one of that old fox’s subordinates.”

“Accepted?”

“Well, we were going to get paid a ridiculous amount, and we figured we could threaten Serid and get him to pay up even more. So yes, we did.”

Alright, so my guesses are on this whole thing being a part of a power struggle, but why go so far just to kill the twins? I mean, they were sixth and seventh in the line of succession. They weren’t even anywhere near the throne.

It looked like we were going to need to dig a little bit deeper if we wanted to figure out exactly what was going on.

CHAPTER 94

NOT ALL PEOPLE WITH BAD PERSONALITIES ARE NECESSARILY EVIL

“Up.”

“Guah!”

Fran gave Serid’s back a good stomp. The sudden influx of pain caused the chamberlain to awaken. The combination of his aching back and Fran’s cold gaze left him feeling a sense of intimidation.

“W-What is it?”

“Why kill Flut and Satia?”

“I-I fail to grasp the essence of your question.”

“Pirate blabbed. Said Serid was mastermind.”

“What you mean to say is that you believe the ramblings of a mere pirate?”

He’s still saying that? My guess was that he wanted to abuse his authority and push everything under the rug or something, but that didn’t seem all that feasible given the current circumstances.

“Hired Pirates. Murder Flut and Satia.”

“I would never!”

[Huh?]

(Master, problem?)

[No, it’s nothing. Keep interrogating him.]

“Nn.”

“Why do you want them dead?”

“I have not the slightest clue!”

Huh, wow. He isn't lying.

“How did you make the blue cat tribe move? Slave Merchants.”

“Blue cat tribe? I understand not what you are saying...”

“Assassin at the inn. Where did you hire? When?”

“You speak but of nonsense... Wait! You said that an assassin had appeared at the inn!?”

It looked he he really didn't know anything. Well, I mean I get the whole incident with the blue cat tribe's slave merchants because he was literally never informed of it. But I never would've expected him not to know of the assassin either.

Wait, so what exactly is going on? Why do the pirates think that he was the one who hired them despite him thinking otherwise?

“Which subordinate contacted pirates?”

“I have already stated that I have not the slightest idea. Cease with this farce immediately! I know precisely your plans, you wished to accuse me of treason from the very beginning.”

He was actually being a hundred percent serious. He isn't lying at all, which could mean that he actually didn't have any part in this... not that I can actually believe that.

“Do not take me for a fool. I can clearly see that this is not but a scenario written by that detestable Reidosian spy.”

“I cannot believe that to be true, Serid. Salrut is one of our mother's, the queen's knights. He is a man that has earned her trust.”

“Her Majesty’s trust in him is based but in deception.”

Serid’s reply to the prince evidenced that he truly believed Salrut to be a spy.

Okay, this is looking bad. I seriously have no idea what’s even going on anymore.

Alright, let’s think this all over.

They slipped out, and as a result, they managed to get themselves kidnapped by the blue cat tribe’s illegal slave traders. They were about to get shipped off to Reidos so they could be sold as merchandise, but then we stepped in and saved them. That task would likely have fallen onto Salrut’s shoulders had we not shown up that night. It looked like this wasn’t the first time this’d happened. The twins seemed to have made sneaking out a sort of habit, and it’d probably be even easier for them to actually manage to escape if the guards had a hole in their security net. Serid definitely had more than enough power to arrange for such a hole.

The next thing to consider would be the assassin we handed off to Salrut. The person who hired him had tipped him off so that he’d be able to infiltrate the building with ease. The assassin probably needed a map to actually sneak in. He also would’ve needed to know where all the guards were. Again, Serid could’ve easily provided all that information.

The last thing we needed to consider was the whole pirate thing. The pirates attacked us because one of Serid’s subordinates contacted and hired them. It was really weird that the prince and princess didn’t have any sort of combat-based escort ship that went along with them on the trip either. That, like everything else thus far, was something that was within Serid’s realm of manipulation given the extent of his power.

Yeah uh... it seemed that all the evidence pointed to Serid.

“Captain.”

“Y-Yes?”

“No escort ships. Why?”

“That was apparently just the type of job it was. We were told that bringing escorts along would make us stand out.”

Okay yeah, this whole thing seems super suspicious. People might start doubting us soon too, and yeah, I'd really prefer for that not to happen, so we should probably get this solved and over with soon.

"Who hired you?"

"I can't say for sure until check out the logs we have back at HQ, but... It should've been Serid."

"T-That is nothing short of impossible. I see no reason for that responsibility to have fallen on my head."

"What are you saying Serid? We agreed that you would be responsible for arranging our boat trip."

"Yes, I am aware of that. However, I instructed one of my men to handle the task for me."

"Did you not find it odd that he was only able to procure a single vessel?"

"Of course I did. However, I also felt it reasonable given the season and circumstances. I was informed that we would instead be prepared a state of the art vessel equipped with the newest technology, so I had reluctantly agreed to the terms proposed."

He wasn't lying, which meant he actually didn't have anything to do with prepping the ship either?

"Who got ship ready?"

"I-It should have been Naymario!"

Serid looked towards one of the men standing by the prince's side. Serid seemed to have thought that he had asked him to hire the Luciel Conglomerate, but the man, Naymario, only shook his head in response.

"I merely followed your orders."

"What!? Naymario, you traitor!"

Serid's pitch rose in surprise, which made sense. Naymario was lying, after all.

In other words, Naymario was trying to frame Serid.

Salrut acted before Serid could give any further replies. He promptly gave his head an understanding nod and got his men to force Serid on his feet.

"Restrain that man immediately. He has committed treason through the act of plotting the assassination of a member of the royal family."

Wait, hold up. I still want to keep the interrogation going for a bit longer. Serid isn't actually guilty, so yeah.

"Wait."

"What is it, Fran?"

"Want to ask a bit more."

"That should not be necessary. You have already done enough, you've exposed the criminal's conspiracy. Please, leave the rest to me."

"No proof yet. Might not be mastermind."

"I am absolutely certain that he is, especially given all the evidence presented."

Wait a second.

(Master?)

[Salrut just lied.]

(Nn?)

[Let's try throwing a few questions at Naymario and Salrut in turn.]

(Nn. Got it.)

This whole scenario had taken quite the interesting turn.

“Naymario. Question.”

“What is it?”

“Really followed Serid’s instructions?”

“To the letter.”

Yup, he definitely just lied. I’m absolutely positive that he’s in on this whole thing, but I can’t yet tell if he’s the one pulling the strings or if he’s just a pawn.

“Salrut too.”

“What is it?”

“Not a Reidosian spy?”

“Hah hah hah! Of course not! I’ve long cast that country aside and devoted every last fibre of my being to the Fyrias Kingdom.”

Salrut declared his allegiances in a confident, convincing voice. It’d sounded like he didn’t even need to think before answering.

His act was awfully convincing, but in the end, it was just an act. It didn’t matter how persuasive he sounded. There was simply no way for him to bypass the Principle of Falsehood.

[I hate to say it, but it looked like Serid was right. Salrut’s a Reidosian spy.]

(Really?)

[Really.]

Thinking about it from that perspective made everything click into place.

The Kingdom of Reidos had a pretty good relationship with the illegal slave merchants from which it bought its goods. He probably didn’t need to do anything beyond just

saying the word to get them on board with his plans.

He was also more than just capable of producing the opportunity the assassin needed to sneak into the building. Plus, he didn't even tell Serid that there was an assassin in the first place. He just covered it up instead. The dark knight had said he was going to hand the assassin over to the proper authorities, but thinking about it, he probably just silenced him instead.

It would've been pretty easy for him to hire the pirates too so long as he and Naymario were working together. Or rather, it was pretty obvious that they were working together.

I mean, Serid's attitude hadn't helped in the slightest, but man, Salrut had totally pulled one over our heads.

(What now?)

[Good question. I wish I knew the answer...]

CHAPTER 95

THE SWORD OF TRUTH (NOT REALLY)

Man, Salrut really got us. I never thought that he of all people would actually be the person pulling the strings behind all this.

I really wish I found out his true nature right when we met, but, keeping the Principle of Falsehood active 24/7 wasn't exactly something I was willing to do.

The thing is, I was actually planning to sit down and interrogate him, but I ended up inadvertently trusting him because he was one of the twins' acquaintances.

In fact, we ended up trusting him so much that we hadn't even considered using the skill on him until after we'd used it on Naymario.

[Hmm... What to do...?]

Either way, we first decided to heal the soldiers that we just beat up so that they wouldn't die while we considered our options. Only after that did I continue to ponder.

I was absolutely certain that Salrut was a Reidosian spy and that he was working together with Naymario. The only problem was that I couldn't prove it. We couldn't prove that we had the ability to see through lies either, so that was a no go.

Man, all this spy and conspiracy stuff was a huge pain to deal with. I almost just wanted to ditch them and pretend I didn't see anything, but... nah, that'd be going a bit too far. At this rate, Salrut was probably going to end up having the twins assassinated whilst also silencing Serid in the process.

I mean, I couldn't have cared less about what ends up happening to Serid, but, I did want to help the twins. They were Fran's friends. She'd probably end up pretty sad if something happened to them.

[We need to figure out how we can get him to confess.]

(Beat him up?)

(Woof?)

[Wait, wait. Beating information out of someone isn't supposed to be the first thing you turn to. It's more of a last resort.]

(Really?)

The way I saw it, spies tended to be the type of people that wouldn't talk regardless of how much you tortured them, so roughing him up might not even help us at all to begin with.

And if things went south, then we might end up being wanted by the state.

"Is that enough? I would really like to get to questioning him."

Crap! They're going to go drag Serid off somewhere if I don't think of something quick. Come on me! Think! Think!

(Brute force?)

(Woof woof!)

[Hold on! I already told you to make that our last resort!]

If this kept up, Fran was probably going to pull her supposed last resort out right away.

Wait, I got it! This'll probably sound a bit forced, but it was pretty much the only thing I could think of given a moment's notice.

[Fran, make sure you repeat exactly what I say.]

(Nn. Got it.)

[Urushi, go casually stand around where Salrut and Naymario are so they can't run away or anything like that.]

(Woof!)

Alright, here's to hoping this works...

"Wait. Just a bit."

First things first, we made sure they didn't actually carry Serid off anywhere.

"What is it?"

Salrut seemed a bit irritated at the fact that Fran stopped him again, which was good. The less calm he was, the easier this would be.

"Have item. Will help prove Serid's guilt."

"Oh?"

Salrut made a bit of a dubious face in response. He likely didn't want us to interfere further, but decided to go along with it for the time being. Serid, on the other hand, had his face cloud over. He probably thought we were on Salrut's side, and that we were trying to make him seem even more guilty than he already was.

"Seal release."

I immediately began to transform, seemingly in response to Fran's words. I activated Thunder Blade while also using purification based magic in order to make myself appear divine.

"Woah!"

"W-What in the world is that?"

The people around us let out cries of shock as they watched a glowing sword suddenly change shape right before their very eyes. My blade grew several wing shaped protrusions; I turned what appeared to be a ceremonial weapon, an armament used for nothing more than rituals.

"W-What is that?"

"Sword of Truth. Functionality easier to show than explain. Flut."

“Y-Yes?”

“Say sister’s name.”

“Wha?”

“Tell me your sister’s name. Give answer.”

“A-Alright. My sister’s name is Satia Diel Fyrias.”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“W-Woah, where did that voice come from!?”

“Sword of Truth. Magic tool. Discerns the truth from lies.”

Yup, one big fat lie, coming right up. Well, actually it is *kind of* true, seeing as how I do have the Principle of Falsehood. Whatever, either way, this was what I managed to come up with at the last possible moment. We were going to convince everyone that I was some sort of magical lie detector so we could demonstrate that Salrut wasn’t what he appeared to be. In other words, we were trying to get him to confess.

First things first though, we had to make sure that everyone here actually thought I was able to discern between what was true and what wasn’t.

Times like this almost made me wish I had a skill improved our ability to act or something, but whatever. The issue was that I was kind of a sword, and I wasn’t really moving around or anything, so I wasn’t sure if I could actually manage to convince everyone that I was in fact the real deal. Moreover, the Principle of Falsehood didn’t actually make Fran herself sound any more convincing. It did, however, make me sound more convincing, which was good enough, I guess.

I made sure to make my voice as monotone and machine-like as I could. In fact, I actually based my speech patterns off the system announcer. I even went as far as to use Appraisal Jamming in order to make myself a fake status page, but unfortunately, no one here could actually use appraisal, so that ended up as nothing but wasted effort.

“Next, Satia’s turn. Ask a question.”

“Okay. In that case, I’ll ask my brother something. Flut, what present did we get from our elder sister, Angellica, on our fifth birthday?”

“I believe she gave us a pair of matching amulets.”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“It answered!”

“And it was correct too.”

“I-I’ll ask the next question. What is our father’s favourite food?”

“I believe it is meat.”

[A lie has been told.]

“I-It was right again!”

It looked like the twins’ father, the king, was probably more fond of sweet foods. That means he’s probably really fat. I wonder if he’s got diabetes.

The twins took turns asking each other questions. The started out asking fairly innocent stuff like their mother’s name and questions regarding the menu they were presented for dinner the day before yesterday. Soon, however, it devolved to the point where they began asking each other when they last wet the bed and who their first crushes were. I almost wanted to tell them to stop. I really didn’t need to know their deepest, darkest secrets.

In the end, we managed convince both twins that I was a genuine lie detector.

“I-It really can discern the truth from lies.”

“What an amazing magical item it is.”

“Next, Captain.”

“Me?”

“Nn.”

The next group we tried to convince was the ship’s crew. Unlike the prince and princess, they asked nothing indecent. They focused on questions to which I shouldn’t know the answer. That is, they asked each other for information regarding their wives, pets, and recent meals.

And so, we managed to convince all the people around us that I really was the Sword of Truth. In other words, the stage was set.

Salrut’s face had gradually began to warp ever so slightly out of shape. He was probably panicking on the inside. He knew that I would be able to tell that Serid was innocent.

“Hah hah hah! That is quite the amazing item you’ve got there. However, we have no need for it. We all know for a fact that Serid was the one that’d hired the pirates. The pirates said it themselves, after all.”

He immediately tried to brush it off, but there was no way that I was about to let him get off the hook. And so, Fran completely ignored the dark knight and instead turned to Serid in order to ask him a question.

“Did you plan to kill the twins?”

“I have never plotted anything along those lines! I swear that I am innocent!”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“T-That’s impossible! Hearhghalskjdhg”

Salrut tried to speak, but I shut him up with telekinesis. Alright, let’s keep this going!

“Planned to have them kidnapped?”

“I did not.”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“Asked the pirates to attack?”

“I have never once involved myself with those ruffians!”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“Asked Naymario to book the ship?”

“I did.”

[The truth has been spoken.]

The people around us had looks of shock plastered all over their faces. They’d thought Serid to be some sort of despicable traitor, but it turned out that he had been innocent all along.

“Next, Naymario.”

“I-I don’t see the need to answer your questions.”

Yeah, yeah, alright, whatever. He wasn’t getting away anyways, seeing as how Urushi was standing right behind him.

“Tried to frame Serid?”

“O-Of course not!”

[A lie has been told.]

Both twins’ eyes sharpened in response to his answer.

“Conspiring with Salrut?”

“...”

He didn’t respond to the question. Oh well, whatever.

“Conspiring with Salrut? Silence is yes.”

“That’s...”

[The truth has been spoken.]

“Salrut wants to kill twins? Silence still yes.”

“I-I have no idea what you’re talking about! None whatsoever!”

[A lie has been told.]

Heh.

Everyone on the ship had started to point their glares in Naymario’s direction. They all believed him to be a traitor. The Sword of Truth could discern the truth, after all.

That aside, the Principle of Falsehood really was a terrifyingly potent skill. You could probably topple a country with ease if you abused it. But even with all that considered, I still felt that we should probably avoid using it as much as possible. I mean, we had that stupid Auguste noble lead by example and showed us exactly what would happen if we relied on it too much. So yeah, I think we’d be much better off avoiding it as much as possible.

“Next. Questions for Salrut.”

Alright, what now bro? I’m the Sword of Truth, come at me. I’m about to expose all your lies!

“Fuck! Damned brat!”

It seemed like Salrut had also believed that I really was the Sword of Truth. Well, I mean, he was pretty much guaranteed to given what he’s seen me do.

He clearly understood that he couldn’t afford to try to make any sort of excuse, and so, he immediately drew the sword on his hip and leapt towards the twins.

“It looks like I have no other choice but to do this myseagh!”

Or at least he tried to.

“Growl!”

Urushi had instantly turned back to his normal size and pinned the dark knight down with one of his front paws.

“No more need for questions.”

A single glance at the twins’ faces revealed that they now knew the truth, that Salrut had been deceiving them all along.

“This can’t be... Salrut, why!?”

Prince Flut’s immediate reaction was to let out a bitter shout, a shout that resounded throughout the ship in its entirety.

CHAPTER 96

ONE DIFFICULTY AFTER ANOTHER.

Salrut glared at Fran with eyes filled with hatred as Urushi held him down in front of her.

“The Godblade should belong to my country!”

So he really was after the Godblade. Well, it was a super weapon that was strong enough to throw off the balance of power held between nations. Reidos seemed kind of scummy, so it would only make sense for them to want it.

We weren’t able to extract any other information out of him. He let loose the fact that Reidos wanted the Godblade, but refused to say anything else thereafter. I guess it can’t be helped. Spies were tight lipped after all.

We probably could’ve gotten him to spill the beans if we tortured him, but there were children around, so yeah...

Besides, interrogating him was Serid’s job, not ours. If we went ahead and pried the information out of him, we might’ve ended up getting stuck in an international conflict. We were pretty much leg deep in it already, so I didn’t want us to get even more involved.

“Salrut... Why...?”

“I can’t believe he was deceiving us this whole time.”

The twins were still in shock. Apparently, he acted as their guard for over five whole years.

Salrut had claimed to have abandoned the Kingdom of Reidos about eight years ago. He then spent his days wandering around until he ended up somewhere in the Fyrias Kingdom. He happened to stumble upon the Queen as she was being attacked by insurgents, so he protected her, and thus, she decided to grant him a position of knighthood. He had worked as hard as he could for several years on end, and sp, he

was eventually given the honor of guarding members of the royal family.

Okay, that's pretty shady. So basically, he showed up at the same time as a bunch of insurgents and drove them off without taking even the slightest scratch despite being just one dude with a horse? Yeah, seems just a bit more than a bit fishy to me.

Wasn't the queen like, a little too unwary of this sort of thing? I mean, I know he saved her life and all, but she literally placed a Reidosian knight in a position that allowed him direct contact with the royal family.

That thought led to a sneaking suspicion, so I decided to check Salrut's equipment over just to figure out the effects of all the magic items he had on hand.

Name: Ring of Bonds

Effect: Makes it easier for the wearer to bond with other people. This item becomes more effective the longer one stays in contact with the wearer.

Honestly, I hadn't paid it too much mind at first, but that was only because I didn't think its effect to be too significant. It turned out that I was wrong. The ring's effect was much more than I'd been expecting. I used the Eye of Empyria alongside Magical Perception and Sorcery in order to further investigate the item only to find that it'd been imbued with a very significant amount of magical power.

It wasn't strong enough to brainwash people or anything like that, but was more than enough to make one throw almost all their wariness out the window.

"This ring?"

"What are you doing!? Stop tha-geh!"

"Woof!"

It looked like something really important, as Salrut started to struggle the moment we tried to take it from him, but Urushi immediately applied more force to his front paw and crushed all the dark knight's resistance.

Apparently, he was having a lot of fun grinding Salrut into the ground with his paws. He'd even occasionally switch between his two front paws just so he could squish him

a bit with each in turn. Every time he did, Salrut would let out a funny sounding groan, which only entertained the large, black wolf all the more.

“What is it, Fran?”

“Nn. Ring. Suspicious.”

Fran handed Salrut’s ring over to Serid after forcibly ripping it off his finger. Taking the ring away from him had seemed to be the right choice given the impatient tone the act had elicited in response.

Immediately following that, we decided to go around questioning all the knights. Normally, spotting one cockroach meant that there were actually around ten others roaming about, and spies were pretty much cockroaches in their own right. Through that act, we managed to weed out two more traitors.

And that was pretty much it. We did all we could for them so I returned to my usual form and returned to the sheath hanging off Fran’s back.

The next thing we decided to do was to head to Barbra, or least it was until we realized that the pirates still had treasure hidden away at their base. More importantly was the fact that that said base was on route. Apparently, it was hidden away amongst a bunch of islands.

It sounded like they had a bunch, so I was really looking forward to raiding the place. We ended up doing a tonne, so we totally needed a plentiful reward, right?

Captain Rengil asked the pirate captain an interesting question as we had the latter guide us over to his hideout.

“Attacking a ship and murdering the royalty on it really isn’t a pirate-like thing to do, is it?”

Wait, really? It sounded perfectly pirate-like to me.

“It’s not?”

Apparently Fran was wondering the same thing, so she immediately asked the captain for his reasoning.

“Well, pirates may be ruffians through and through, but, they don’t normally kill people who don’t fight back. They almost never harm anyone that chooses to surrender.”

“Really?”

“Really. Attacking ships the way they do is something that naturally incurs a lot of risk. Most ships tend to be guarded by mercenaries or adventurers, and they don’t even know what’s on the ship until after they take it over.”

Oh, I get it. So there’s a pretty good chance they’ll lose more than they gain.

“That’s why they normally choose to take hostages and demand ransom payments in exchange for their safety. It’s far more profitable for them that way. It’s kind of weird to put it like this, but the piracy business is built on trust. People wouldn’t pay ransom if they didn’t trust the pirates not to harm their hostages, after all.”

“Makes sense.”

“Murdering members of the royal family is pretty much completely out of the pirates’ realm of operation. If their deeds were discovered, then whatever country the royals belonged to would likely send a subjugation force. Moreover, the public would lose trust in them and effectively force them to terminate their business.”

“Then, Serid’s suggestion, surrendering. Correct decision?”

“Under normal circumstances, yes. Surrendering would have been the best possible decision by far.”

Ohhhh, that’s how it is. Whoops. Sorry Serid, I really shouldn’t have started suspecting you because of that. I blame Salrut, it’s all his fault.

“We decided to accept the request because we really needed the money. Thought it’d work out because there wouldn’t be any proof.”

Apparently, Salrut had actually started probing them out about a week ago. That was probably right around when he started getting ready to have the prince and princess murdered.

The pirates had figured out that everything would go well so long as they followed Salrut's instructions. They likely would have succeeded had we not been here. To Salrut, hiring Fran was akin to digging his own grave.

Well, technically, I guess he wasn't the one that dug it out. The twins were responsible for the suggestion. The three of them got along pretty well, so they must've wanted to spend more time with her.

Either way, as far as Salrut was concerned, hiring Fran was akin to throwing another factor into the mix. He probably allowed it because the lack of an escort ship meant that they didn't really have that many people to fend off any incoming magic beasts, and he himself wasn't exactly planning to die at sea. The issue lay with the fact that he had no idea that she was strong enough to sink the entire pirate fleet with ease.

"Needed money? Why?"

"You remember the condition our ships were in?"

"Nn."

It looked like they'd just been through some sort of battle. Some of them even had holes in their decks.

"We needed money so we could have them repaired."

"Why so damaged?"

"It all happened seven days ago..."

The pirate seemed to go straight down memory lane.

"We did the usual. We left our hideout in search of prey."

His eyes seemed kind of hazy, as if he was looking at something far off in the distance. Come on, I really don't care about all this sentimental stuff. Just sum it up for us or something.

Apparently, they left their base as usual, one thing led to another, and they eventually

ended up running into a gigantic magic beast. The magic beast instantly sank four of their ships, left two heavily damaged, and the rest in the state in which we first saw them.

“Magic Beast?”

“Yeah, it was a gigantic monster the likes of which I’d never seen before. If I had to guess, I’d say it was most likely some type of sea serpent.”

“How big?”

“I couldn’t see the whole thing, but, its girth was about the same as my ship’s.”

Woah, that’s big. If it was as wide as a ship, then it was most likely about a hundred odd meters long.

It was probably the magic beast that we’d heard about back in Dharz, the one that was seen hanging around the coastal area.

I don’t know if we’ll end up running into it, but I guess we should be extra careful just in case seeing as how we didn’t know the extent of its strength.

Wait, I feel like I might’ve just jinxed it. Nah... no way, right...?

“We’ve spotted a massive shadow in the ocean. It’s right in front of us.”

Okay, yeah, I definitely just jinxed it.

“Master.”

[Yeah, I know. Let’s go, Urushi!]

“Woof!”

The magic beast we were about to challenge was one strong enough to completely demolish the pirate’s fleet with ease. This little ship of ours would probably be screwed if we just sat around and didn’t do anything.

“Captain.”

“It’s right over there, Fran!”

We looked in the direction the captain was pointing, and surely enough, we saw something massive wriggling around beneath the water’s surface despite the fact that we were still over a hundred meters away from it.

“It looks like it’s heading right for us.”

“Can’t get away?”

“I doubt it. It’s a bit too quick for us.”

Well, I guess that means we’re going to have to fight. Wait, Fran, why are your eyes sparkling like that? We’re in a pretty bad spot here, you know?

“Victory goes to first to attack.”

[Hah... Alright, I guess it can’t be helped. Let’s hit it with everything we’ve got.]

“Nn.”

The only thing I was worried about was the fact that our attacks might not land given that the giant sea serpent was still underwater.

[Hey Urushi, could you try provoking it a bit so it surfaces?]

“Bark bark bark!”

Wow, they both seem like they really want to go at it. I mean, that’s good and all, but they’re almost kind of like warmongers at this point.

Alright, I guess Fran and I will get ready to attack while Urushi does his thing. The enemy’s body was so big that we had no choice but to go all out.

[I’m going to use my Telekinetic Catapult. Could you throw me while using wind magic and some sort of Elemental Blade to power it up?]

“Roger.”

The first thing I did was transform and optimize my body in order to draw out as much power as possible. The image I had in mind was something like a bullet. I purged all my spare parts and carved a spiral like groove into my body.

My resulting form was one that I felt like I'd seen before. Ah, right, I very closely resembled a certain Archer's rendition of Caladbolg, which was fine seeing as how I'd gained a lot more penetrating power.

I then proceeded to activate Flame Blade, wind magic, Vibration Fang, and Vulcanization simultaneously. Parallel Processing allowed it all to happen without a hitch.

[You ready, Fran?]

(Nn. Ready whenever.)

[Alright, good.]

I began getting ready to use Telekinesis.

And then, our chance came.

“Gyagyagagagagaoooo!”^[1]

“Woof!”

“Urushi. Good job.”

Urushi had been firing potshots at the creature from above. It didn't take him long to annoy it enough for it to finally surface. Its giant head emerged from the sea as it attempted to chase him down. It was so big that it looked like it could probably swallow an entire blue whale with ease.

It didn't look like a snake though. Instead, it moreso resembled an earthworm. Its mouth looked like that of a sea anemone in that it was lined with gigantic fangs.

“Go!”

[Yeah, let's do this!]

Fran threw me with everything she had. Her throw alone was so powerful that it had enough kinetic energy to send me flying through anything on or below the level of a lesser wyvern.

I released all of the telekinetic force I'd been saving up and accelerated myself even further.

[Uooooooooohhhhh!]

A massive impact force assaulted the magic beast the moment I made contact; a crater ten meters in diameter suddenly appeared where I assumed the creature's neck was.

The impact was so powerful that it sent me flying off in some direction immediately afterwards. A good chunk of my blade had been destroyed, and the rest had cracks running through it. It looked like using Overboost really did put way too much strain on my body.

But I didn't have any time to lament over the amount of damage my suicide attack had done to me.

[Holy crap! What the hell is this thing!?!]

Appraising the magic beast had left me in a state of shock and awe.

General Information

Species Name: Midgard Wyrms (Sea serpent)

Magic Beast

Lv. 60

HP: 35991/38709

MP: 531

STR: 4019

VIT: 4669

AGI: 102

INT: 5

MGC: 109

DEX: 24

Skills

Absorption: Lv 2

Regeneration: Lv 2

Predation

Description

An ocean parasite said to have the ability to grow infinitely. It's not very smart and does nothing but follow its instincts. It'll even attempt to eat anything that moves. It lacks any sort of unique abilities, the only thing special about it is its size. However, it is precisely its size that causes its enemies the most trouble. Legends have said that these creatures have even swallowed entire islands in the past. It is extremely difficult to kill, and is considered an A level threat. Its magic stone is located in its heart.

Seriously? It's got over 30k HP!? The attack we just used didn't even chunk 10% of its total health. To make matters worse, it was an A level threat.

It didn't have that many skills, and if you only looked at its skills, you'd probably think that it was really weak. Its only selling point was that it was big. Seriously though, it was way too big for anyone's good...

[Tsk. What a pain.]

CHAPTER 97

IS THAT A WORM OR A SNAKE?

“Gyooo!”

The Midgard Wyrms turned its eyes on me with a threatening gaze. Or, at least that’s how it felt. I couldn’t actually see its eyes anywhere. That said, it seemed to have realized that the attack I’d just hit it with had damaged me as well.

I intended on piercing it all the way through, but its skin was too thick, and flesh too brawny. Its tough body stopped my Telekinetic Catapult in its tracks.

[This thing’s huge.]

Even just the part that’d risen above the water was 30 whole meters long.

I continued observing the magic beast as my blade regenerated. It was starting to heal up as well. Its regeneration was really low level, but its HP pool was massive to begin with, so it was actually healing fairly rapidly.

“Gyagaruooohhh!”

[Woah!]

The Midgard Wyrms spat something at me. Its aim was rather precise, the glob of stomach acid would’ve hit me head on if I hadn’t dodged. It looked like that attack was what it’d used to mess up all the pirate ships we saw.

[This thing’s still just full of energy.]

I mean, it managed to stop my Telekinetic Catapult’s momentum, but it still did have a giant gaping hole in its neck or head area. Normally, you’d think its movements would dull as a result, but it didn’t seem to have actually felt the attack at all.

It looked like we wouldn’t be able to kill it if we just tried to whittle down its HP. But that was fine, there were other ways for us to kill it.

We could try going for its vitals. Ideally, I'd like kill it by destroying its magic stone, but its body was so big that I was having trouble finding it. Oh well, whatever. We didn't actually need to bother finding its magic stone in order to kill it, seeing as how it had one of its vitals exposed.

I let loose a second overboosted Telekinetic Catapult.

My durability plummeted yet again in response to the resulting shockwave. The attack was a bit weaker than it was before because I didn't have Fran's assistance, but, it was still powerful enough to create a second, 8 meter wide crater right where the wyrm's head was.

[Hell yeah, how's that?]

"Gyuuuuuuuuu!!!"

[Tsk. This thing's still moving around as if nothing's happened.]

Alright, whatever, I'll just do it again then. I still had eighty percent of my mana left, so all in all, I could attack roughly five more times before having to devote the rest of my remaining mana into regeneration.

[Take this!]

"Gyaaaaa!!"

Okay, what the hell? The stupid wyrm was ridiculously sturdy. It was still moving around despite the fact that it was missing half its head.

I appraised again in order to check its stats, and it turned out that it still had more than 30k HP remaining, which meant that its head probably wasn't one of its vitals.

Hmmm... I think I'll give it another two or three shots just to see what happens.

[Die!]

"Gyogyaaaaa!!"

And so, the process repeated itself a few times, and I ended completely obliterating its head in its entirety. The Midguard Wyrn no longer possessed either a mouth or a brain, but...

[Why is it still alive!?)

It's movements had dulled by only the slightest bit, and it didn't seem like it was just going to roll over and die anytime soon. In fact, it looked perfectly fine. The flesh around where its head had been had already started to regenerate.

God damn thing doesn't even die when its head gets blown the hell off. It's way too big, and it's got an unrelenting life force to boot. God damn fantasy creatures!

[I-Is it just flat out immortal?]

I guess it really is a worm. Rockworms were kind of like this too, they wouldn't die even if you cut them in half.

[I think I might've used a bit too much mana...]

Damn it. I guess I'll head back on over to Fran. Everything'll only go downhill if I try to keep this up.

I flew back over to the ship while making it look like I was being drawn to Fran's hand.

(Master, status update?)

[I won't be able to kill it with my Telekinetic Catapult.]

(Got it.)

[But I do have an idea.]

(What?)

[...]

(Master?)

[Let's use Deathgaze.]

(Got it.)

The worm was just far too big, and it's life force too unrelenting. Deathgaze's ability to instantly kill its target had a pretty low success rate, but it should still activate once every 30 odd slashes.

Bringing up the suggestion made me feel vexed though. I was relying on other swords despite being a sword myself.

I guess this must be how it feels for a heart surgeon to entrust a parent to his colleague, or for a chef to ask another to cook for his daughter's wedding. The bitterness of defeat welled up deep within every last fibre of my being.

But it couldn't be helped. This wasn't the time for me to be moping around...

(Understood, Master.)

Fran drew Deathgaze out from the dimensional storage. The very act of her brandishing the weapon caused the ship's crew to gulp.

"W-What's that?"

"It's giving me a case of the chills..."

Deathgaze's blade was a deep, pitch black, with red, vein-like lines running up its length. Its appearance was about as ominous as it could get.

"Magic Sword. Deathgaze. Can instantly kill."

"Ah, so you're planning to use it to kill that thing?"

Yeap, the sailor had pretty much hit the nail on the head, but for some odd reason, the captain's face was still twisted in unease.

"I'm not all too sure that the instant kill ability that sword has will actually work on the Midgard Worm."

“Why?”

“I’ve heard rumors saying that Midgard Worms have more than one heart. Instant death effects may not function to their fullest.”

Seriously? It’s got multiple hearts? Well, I guess we can’t really be sure as to how effective Deathgaze’s abilities would be in that case. But whatever, it doesn’t matter. I don’t care how many hearts that damn thing has, I’ll just slash at it till it dies.

(Ready?)

[Yeah, let’s go.]

And so, I headed towards the Wyrms yet again. The sailors had their eyes on us though, so I had to make it look like Fran was controlling me.

“Sword Puppet Theatre.”

“Wow!”

Fran raised both her arms and acted like she was concentrating. To make the act look more natural, she would occasionally even mumble from time to time. It looked like she was having a lot of fun.

In reality, I was obviously just doing the usual and flying around using telekinesis. Likewise, I was also manipulating Deathgaze through the exact same set of actions.

To the onlookers though, it seemed as if Fran was using some sort of mysterious skill to manipulate both swords as she pleased. She was left in a rather defenseless state, but Urushi was with her, so whatever.

(Good luck, Master.)

(Woof!)

[Just leave it to me!]

That said, all I was doing was flying around the Midgard Wyrms and dodging its attacks while slashing at it with Deathgaze in hopes of procuring the latter’s effect.

[Take this!]

“Gyaoaaaaahhh!”

Tsk. Deathgaze’s blade wasn’t actually capable of cutting through the wyrm’s overly thick skin. I had to give it a decent amount of momentum before it’d actually pierce the surface. Obviously, I didn’t go as far as using Telekinetic Catapult, and as a result, the damage inflicted per hit was rather miniscule.

Deathgaze finally activated its effect after 20 or so magic imbued slashes. Its blade shimmered with a deep scarlet light as it attempted to instantly kill the wyrm.

“Gyaaaaaaaaa!!”

Hell yeah! It stopped moving!

A wave of euphoria washed over me, but it only lasted for an instant.

“Gugagaoooooh!”

[What!? Just die already!]

“Gyaaoooo!”

It looked like the captain’s suspicions had been on point. Deathgaze’s ability wasn’t able to instantly kill magic beasts with multiple hearts.

[Alright, fine! I’ll just destroy all your hearts then!]

“Gyooooo”

[Hey! Where are you going? I’m over here goddammit!]

“Gyaoooooohhhhh!”

The Midgard Wurm started to ignore me. Instead, it began making a beeline for the ship.

[Get back here fatass! This is supposed to be between you and me!]

I threw Deathgaze at the Wyrms, but I couldn't get it to turn back around. It was much more interested in nice, edible, living things than a dangerous, inorganic organism like me.

I continued to attack it with Deathgaze and managed to get its effect to activate a second time. The wyrm once again stopped for a few seconds, after which it booted its body back. It soon continued its prior actions as if nothing had happened at all.

Moreover, it had accelerated. The ship Fran was on had already changed its course in an attempt to get away from the creature, but, it was going to catch up, and soon, at that. Damn it, it looks like I really might not be able to kill it with Deathgaze.

[Shit! What do I do? The poison isn't working either...]

Attacking with Deathgaze wasn't the only thing I'd done. I had also tried throwing in a few poison based attacks of my own, but they didn't have any sort of effect on the wyrm at all. It didn't have poison resistance or anything like that. Its body was simply just way too big, I would need to give it a much larger dose for it to actually have any effect. Damn it. It looked like size really did matter.

It didn't look I had any way of actually killing the wyrm. It would just regenerate regardless of how much damage I did to it, so I decided to think up a method to slow it down instead. I guess I could try making it heavier, but... how?

[I got it!]

A light bulb had suddenly seemed to flash inside of my head. The idea I came up with would lead to a bit of a gamble, but I didn't really have much time to think it through.

[Deploying max strength magical barriers! Activating Telekinesis!]

I circled around to the Midgard Wyrms' front, and shot myself forward with another Telekinetic Catapult. This time, however, I didn't aim for its body. Instead, I dove straight inside its half regenerated mouth.

[Commencing Operation Inch High Samurai!] ^[1]

If I couldn't hurt its exterior, I'd just hurt its interior instead.

[Holy crap, that's disgusting.]

The Midgard Worm's insides were nothing short of grotesque. Its organs were all clearly visible, and seeing them almost made me want to retch. To make matters worse, my durability was plummeting at an incredibly rapid pace. The worm didn't actually have a stomach. Instead, it just had its whole body secrete stomach acid nonstop. I probably would've completely melted away in an instant if not for my magical barriers.

The original plan was for me to just kind of go crazy inside of him and destroy everything, but it didn't look like that would work. I had to hurry up, finish my objectives, and then leave, else I'd probably melt.

The only issue lay with the fact that I needed to go a bit deeper inside the worm's body. I activated Telekinesis, threw myself in full throttle, and dove deep into the worm's interior. I reached my destination around when my durability had hit the halfway point.

[Activating Dimensional Storage!]

I immediately brought out every last monolith at once and dropped them all inside the worm's body.

If I dropped them near its mouth, then it'd be able to just spit them back out, but dropping them this deep would probably prevent that from happening.

I had actually wanted to dump the poisoned swamp we picked up as well, but I ended up deciding against it. I mean, it wouldn't cause any issue if the worm's body ended up absorbing it all, but, it'd probably lead to some major pollution if it managed to vomit it all back out. Honestly, I didn't think it'd be *that* bad given how big the ocean was, but, we were kind of close to the shore, so I figured the risk wasn't really worth the reward.

[Oh crap! My durability is getting really low, I've got to get out of here. Short Jump!]

My durability had started to decrease even more quickly because of the friction resulting from me rubbing against all the monoliths now in my immediate vicinity. I

immediately used space/time magic and teleported a rather short distance. Luckily, I was able to get myself outside the wyrm and into the ocean.

Whew. I only had a hundred durability left.

[I really wish that the stupid thing would've exploded or at least ruptured though.]

The wyrm's stomach had grown in width by a factor of 10, but it didn't seem to show any sign of splitting open. Well, I guess it was a snake, and snakes were capable of swallowing things much bigger than themselves without much issue.

That said, having that many massive rocks in its body would probably slow it down.

And sure enough, a bit of observation led me to the conclusion that I was right.

Sweet, the ship should be able to get away before it manages to digest everything and speed itself back up.

[Alright, let's get the hell outta here.]

CHAPTER 98

SIDE STORY: SERID

I am Serid Dinias, chamberlain to the Kingdom of Fyrias.

The current task to which I have been assigned is to oversee Prince Flut and Princess Satia as they develop towards maturity. I have been with them since the earliest years of their childhood, but as of recent, I have started to feel the distance between us gradually begin to grow.

The emotional rift of which I had just discussed was caused but by a single man, Salrut O'Randy, former knight to the Kingdom of Reidos. Despite his former status, Salrut had earned himself a position within the Royal palace. He had obtained his otherwise unjustified position through the act of rescue Her Majesty from a group of insurgents.

He claimed to be a knight without a kingdom, one that had abandoned the Reidosian ways. His origin appeared dubious, and I therefore immediately assumed him to be a spy.

However, despite my suspicions, both His and Her Majesty both came to trust him. I could not fathom as to why, but neither of the two had placed even the slightest bit of doubt within the man. I understood that he saved Her Majesty from an otherwise dangerous situation, but she had conferred far too much faith in him for little reason.

I will admit that the Fryias Kingdom's royal family did possess the tendency to be overly naive. The family's members were rather open and held an extreme lack of caution when compared to royals from other nations. But even then, I felt their choices to be strange and out of scope. They were far too trusting and unwary when it came to matters relating to the former Reidosian knight.

I had suspected that the man had manipulated Their Majesties minds with magic, and thus, I had my men conduct a series of investigations. Most notably, I requested men check as to whether Their Majesties had been charmed or brainwashed. I was almost certain that my suspicions had been correct, however, none of my examinations had ever returned positive results. Moreover, Their Majesties possessed barriers that would repel any weaker attempts, and I doubted that he was capable of casting the

most complicated of spells.

I attempted to warn Their Majesties of my suspicions, but they claimed that they trusted him. My continued persistence led them to drive me from their sides in annoyance. Their choices and actions had left me feeling as mortified as a single individual possibly could.

However, I remained undissuaded from attempting to uncover Salrut's actions regardless. In fact, I did precisely the opposite and furthered my efforts. I began publicly voicing my suspicions despite knowing that Their Majesties would only meet me with greater alienation. Thus was the extent of my resolve.

Salrut truly did well to deserve his title as a Reidosian spy. I was unable to find evidence that would allow me to incriminate him despite my many efforts. However, I did learn of his motifs.

His target was the Fyrias Kingdom's Godblade. He wished to obtain Diabolos, The Demon Lord's Blade.

Godblades were swords told spoken of in legend, but despite their existences being akin to common knowledge, their whereabouts were largely unknown. Many had even been completely forgotten as a result of the passage of time.

At the moment, there were only five Godblades with their names and wielders known to the world: Alpha, The Blade of Origin, Berserk, The Blade of Madness, Ignius, The Brilliant Flameblade, Gaia, The Earth's Edge, and last but not least was our country's prided treasure, Diabolos, The Demon Lord's Blade.

Diabolos was said to have an ancient Demon Lord sealed within it, and he who wielded the blade was to be granted said Demon Lord's power. That is, the Godblade's ability was to summon subservient demons, and it was precisely that ability that has allowed our small, fragile nation to survive throughout the ages.

The blade's weakness is said to be its relative inefficacy in single combat. The records show that a thousand years ago, the blade's successor, one of our Kingdom's crown princes, had challenged the wielder of Crystalos, the Sacred Blade of Water to a duel. He and Diabolos had lost despite Crystalos not being a Godblade. That said, Diabolos more than made up for its deficiencies with its unique trait. Its ability to summon demons has allowed the Fyrias Kingdom to turn the tides of war time and time again.

Another one of Diabolos' unique traits was that it could not be wielded but by a select few. Specifically, only those that had the Fyrias Kingdom's royal blood flowing through their veins could even so much as touch the sword without losing their souls to it. If an unqualified individual attempted to wield the blade, they would lose their life on the spot.

Many other countries knew of the blade's abilities to force demons into one's service, but the rest of its traits were carefully kept hidden except from those qualified to know the Kingdom's national secrets. Members of the royal family would be told of the sword's properties upon their tenth birthdays. They, however, were not the only individuals informed. The king would also inform the Grand Chamberlain and six of his handpicked subordinates of the Godblade's details. The blade would also be described to the Prime Minister and the four men that headed the nation's army.

All individuals exposed to the country's secrets were also granted demons. Naturally, I have one within myself as well. If my life is put in danger, then it will appear and protect me from harm. It is registered as a D level threat, so it is in fact quite powerful. However, I myself am a mere chamberlain. I lack royal blood, and therefore, I cannot control the demon's actions.

While having a demon by one's side may sound convenient, I can assure that it is not necessarily so. The demon contains another feature in that it simultaneously acts as a sort of shackle. Those that attempt to inform the unknowing of the Godblade's properties will immediately be robbed of their voices and transformed into mutes, all for the purpose of preserving secrecy. The demon's final unique trait functioned to much the same purpose. That is, the summoned demons possess the ability to hide themselves from those that are capable of appraisal. While appraisal is indeed a rare skill, it is not one that completely fails to manifest, and thus, this final ability can be said to be mission critical in the preservation of our country's secrets.

Those that bear royal blood are naturally granted demons of a higher quality, C level threats. They serve to function as excellent guardians. They are even capable of healing injuries and eliminating any abnormal status. They so powerful that they can even reverse the deadliest of wounds in a matter of moments.

This, however, leads to its own fair share of complications. The demon's power allows members of the royal family to escape most dangerous situations. Thus, they typically tend not to be very cautious; they fail to develop a true sense of danger.

And that is precisely what led to the incident that we had just experienced. Prince Flut and Princess Satia prepared for their trip to Kranzel with only the most minimal number of escorts. It appeared that Salrut had stated that he would protect the two of them on their journey, and thus, the King himself approved their plans.

Their Highnesses both had demons by their sides, and said demons would undoubtedly protect them from harm. However, it remained a fact that they were but children. It was always possible for them to fall into a sort of trap, and thus, I decided that it would be best for me to accompany them. I had hoped that I would be able to use the dangers that occurred throughout the trip to enlighten them so that they would better understand the risks that awaited them in the future.

And then, Salrut acted. One night, he brought back with him not only Their Highnesses, but also a group of children that I could only find to be suspicious. I admit that they were but mere children, and that they were unlikely to inflict harm on Their Highnesses' persons. However, I was well aware that many assassins began work from a tender age, and thus, I practiced caution. I intentionally sharpened my tongue when addressing them; I tested each child's reactions in turn in order to gauge their purposes.

My probing had led me to believe that one of the children was far more suspicious than the rest. The individual that I had chosen to keep my eye on was a young, cat eared lass by the name of Fran. I was unable to see a respectable person in her regardless of how hard I looked. Moreover, I noticed her sneak around the building in order to converse with Salrut.

Both the Prince and Princess had seemed to take a liking to her. I, however, refused to be fooled. I decided then that I would expose the core of her character and thus, I attempted to get in her way. I secretly hoped for her judge me an obstacle, for she would be subject to a demon's power should she have attempted to attack me.

All in all, I had presumed that I was still in control of the situation, but it soon spiraled far beyond even my wildest fantasies.

We were attacked by pirates as we traversed the seas. Fran defeated the enemy fleet and even went as far as to bring back their captain, and that was when the twist occurred. The aforementioned captain immediately began accusing me of plotting to assassinate the Prince and Princess.

I had been caught in a trap. I was subject to a form of attack of which I had completely failed to anticipate.

I was knocked unconscious when I attempted to protest the situation. Much to my misfortune, my demon had not been summoned as there had been no danger to my life.

When I awoke, I found myself on the floor. One of my most trusted subordinates, Naymario, had betrayed me for the enemy. Their Highnesses proceeded to stare at me, their eyes filled with doubt and suspicion. I had been driven into a corner, and my heart had been filled but with despair.

But then, she assisted me. Fran had activated a peculiar item that went by the name “The Sword of Truth.” Much to my surprise, she used the blade to prove my innocence. Witnessing the the item she possessed immediately led me to understand that it was one of extraordinary value. Its functionality was so incredible that I felt the urge to ask her whether she felt open to negotiation over its ownership.

In the end, I concluded that she too had merely been manipulated by Salrut. She was not on of his collaborators, nor was she another Reidosian spy. She was simply a child that happened to possess exceptional skill in the art of combat, and that was all.

Salrut truly was a fool. He attempted to assassinate Their Highnesses without even the slightest bit of knowledge of the demons that protected them. It appeared that he attempted to turn them into slaves as well, but even that would have been meaningless. The collars that induced slavery meant nothing before the demons that protected Their Highnesses.

Contemplating Salrut’s circumstances had led me to further develop my speculations. I arrived at the conclusion that he had likely discovered that only members of the royal family could touch the Godblade. Thus, he attempted to use one of our country’s royals to fulfill his ambitions. However, that planned had ultimately ended in failure, and hence, he instead redirected his efforts into reducing the number of potential wielders. If we arrived in Barbra, then the prince and princess would’ve had eyes all over them. Moreover, Kranzel had its own information network, one that would make it difficult for him to many any sort of move. Hence, he had chosen to eliminate Their Highnesses before he lost the opportunity.

Such a plan would indeed have caused our country damage had it succeeded. The Godblade's potential wielders were surprisingly low in number. The second prince was sickly, his body was unable to handle the burden that came with wielding Diabolos' power. The third and fourth princes had both perished in the process of subjugating magic beasts. Most of our princesses had already been wed, and thus, they no longer resided within the country. Moreover, it appeared that the Godblade itself had a sort of finicky nature. I cannot explain the reason for which this phenomenon occurs, but the Godblade refused to acknowledge those that had been married off as potential wielders. The same applied to their children despite the fact that Fyrias' royal blood ran through their veins.

In other words, the Godblade had very few potential wielders. There were only six different people could potentially put its power on display: His Majesty the King, the Crown Prince, the Fifth Princess, Prince Flut, Princess Satia, and the Seventh Princess. If Prince Flut and Princess Satia were to fall, then the Godblade would lose two of its six potential bearers. In other words, the Kingdom of Fyrias would suffer a heavy blow.

The mention of Prince Flut and Princess Satia reminded me of their current circumstances. Both were currently within the ship's cabin. Their highnesses are still in shock as a result of Salrut's sudden betrayal. I've no idea as to how I could improve their moods, so I've no choice but to await their recoveries.

I do hope that they will be able to calm themselves in time for our arrival, as they must attend the ceremonies held in Barbra in a manner befitting representatives of the Fyrias Kingdom. Our country is small one. The sea lies to our west, but each our other three borders leads to contact with another country. To our south is the hostile Kingdom of Reidos. To our north and east lies Kranzel, one of our greatest allies. Our relationship with the Kingdom of Kranzel is excellent, and therefore it is imperative for the Prince and Princess to appear to be in good spirits.

It was very fortunate that we were able to eliminate the Reidosian spy before arriving in Kranzel, for it would have been possible for him to attempt to damage the relationship between our countries. I cannot thank Miss Fran enough for her actions; she even managed to identify and seize one of his magic items, a ring that would make those around him less wary of his actions.

Our voyage across the ocean had truly been one filled with twists and turns. Salrut's meddling had added danger and drama, but not even that was meant to be the end of it all. Fate reared its head once more as the pirate onslaught was immediately followed

by the appearance of an enormous magic beast. The creature that threatened to end our lives was incredibly powerful. Its classification was that of an A level threat. It was far beyond anything our demons could protect us from, and so once again, I was assaulted by despair. My only hope at the time was that Their Highnesses would keep their lives.

However, it appeared that not all was lost. Miss Fran had somehow once again managed to save us. She immediately used a skill the likes of which I had never seen before and assaulted the approaching Midgard Wyrms with a series of fierce blows. Each had such strength that I could even tell from afar that she had managed to leave massive holes within the beast's flesh.

Her power lay beyond the very realm of my comprehension. Witnessing it led me to think back on the attitude with which I had approached her. Needless to say, I immediately regretted my actions. My back had become drenched with ice cold sweat before I had even realized it.

I could not help but sigh in relief. I was grateful that she had tolerated my overly antagonizing actions.

She recalled her sword after her first stream of attacks and drew another. I witnessed her as she manipulated both weapons and barraged the magic beast with yet another glorious onslaught. It seemed that her second blade had the ability to instantly kill its foes, however, the wyrm she was pitted against had multiple hearts, and therefore, multiple lives. Her second blade's effect had failed her. The battle's ultimate outcome appeared unpredictable; I had no idea as to how it would end, and so, I had no choice but to watch her every action as the scene unfolded before me.

The final attack she used involved plunging one of her swords through the beast's mouth. It dove inside the wyrm's stomach and performed a series of actions unknown to me. Whatever the sword did appeared effective, for the beast's movements seemed to dull as it let out a pained shriek.

The ship's captain rejoiced, for the young lady's actions had allowed us to escape the beast.

She then retrieved her blade with what appeared to be magic, sheathed it, and moved towards the pirate. The young miss instructed him to guide the ship to his base with a nonchalant expression. She looked as if she hadn't even broken a sweat despite her

many efforts. And so, once again, I was made to acknowledge her strength, and again, I was made to break out in cold sweat.

She then asked (threatened) for the individuals present not to reveal her abilities going forward. The same request applied to The Sword of Truth. No one present dared to defy her, we all nodded in obedience respect. Specifically, the line she uttered was as follows.

“Don’t tell. Likely will lead to regret.”

It was only natural for us to agree given what we had witnessed. Our inclination towards the provision of a positive response was only furthered by the wolf that stood behind us whilst growling in a low, threatening tone.

There was, however, one matter that I found important to note. Only her longsword had returned to her. I had no idea as to the other blade’s fate, but I presumed that she had lost it as a result of the battle. Her second blade had appeared to be of a considerable quality as it even had the ability to instantly slay its foes. I felt it to be a shame that she had lost it.

Further consideration led me to understand that the sword had only departed her because she had used it to protect us. It would not do for us not to compensate her for it. Salrut, the man technically responsible for her employment, was now being held in captivity, so it went without saying that the matter of her payment would also now fall upon our shoulders.

That, however, is but secondary. Her payment was a matter of great importance, but not one that took precedence over the acknowledgement and expression of my own wrongdoings. The manner in which I had treated was not but unfair and rude. I know not if she will forgive my actions, but I feel that I must offer her my most sincere and heartfelt apologies regardless.

“Excuse me, Miss Fran. Would you happen to have a spare moment?”

CHAPTER 99

BARBRA

“We’ve got eyes on Barbra!”

We finally arrived at Barbra three days after our initial departure. Man, have we been through a lot. The trip was full of nothing but ups and downs, we hit unexpected twists and turns at almost every single corner.

Surprisingly, today was still only the 30th of March, which meant that we actually managed to make it in time for the Lunar Banquet.

The first thing we did after escaping the Midgard Wyrms’ wrath was raiding the pirates’ base. That is, we casually cruised over, kicked them around, and “happened upon” all their treasure. I’ve got to say, it was it well worth it. Their vault was filled with cash, equipment, exotic spices, jewels, and plenty of expensive looking items made from gold and silver.

I mean, technically speaking, the treasure we “found” didn’t have anyone’s name written on it, and you know, finders keepers and stuff. Yup, we totally didn’t steal it. Not at all. Besides, it’s not like we were the only ones that went through with the act of “stumbling across” treasure. Countries would embezzle stuff from pirates all the time. Moreover, their methodologies were far more shameless than our own. They’d even go as far as to create this whole pretense in which they’d talk about taking things back for the people even though they always ended up just chucking all the pirates’ loot straight into their national reserves.

The ship’s Captain, Rengil, happened to be a merchant, so we had him look over all the stuff we “found.” Apparently, it totalled up to approximately a hundred million Golde. I had personally had thought it to be an absolutely monumental sum. In fact, I even had trouble wrapping my head around it all. That said, it was still not that much in proportion to what was needed to repair all the pirates’ ships. The magic tools and items used in a ship’s construction were extremely expensive. Each cannon and propulsion system would each flat out cost a fortune on its own.

Under normal circumstances, we wouldn’t actually be entitled to even the slightest

piece of the loot, as adventurers were typically put in the same category as the ship's crew when it came to this kind of thing. If they were lucky, they'd get a small bonus, but that was all. All the treasure we found was supposed to be rightfully belong to its discoverers and our employers. In this case, those two parties would be the Luciel Conglomerate and the Prince's group respectively.

However, the feats we had accomplished had been outstanding. We saved the ship twice, weeded out a spy, and even protected the two royals from all the possible harm that would've otherwise befallen them. Thus, they decided to give us a fair chunk of the treasure.

We were allowed the option to pick whatever we wanted, so we immediately claimed a large portion of the spices the pirates had saved up. Many of the aforementioned spices were extremely rare and expensive, there were even some that I'd never seen before. Eyeballing, I'd say we took enough to make about ten thousand servings of curry, which meant we profited at least a hundred thousand gold Golde off the spices alone.

They said we could have a cut of the actual jewelry type stuff as well, so we happily accepted their offer. I didn't really know what was valuable and what weren't, so we just decided just take a random pair of treasure chests. The first chest we chose was on the smaller side, but whatever. The second was kind of interesting in the sense that it the Alchemist's Guild's crest engraved upon it. We didn't actually check what was inside either chest, but if anything, that was the part that fired me up the most. ^[1]

After splitting some of the loot with us, they went ahead and paid us another additional sum on top of all that. The prince's party was really generous, and all in all, we ended up with about two million Golde on hand. Holy crap, the amount of cash we had flat out doubled because of this one little job.

Having an abundance of cash meant that Fran could splurge on whatever the hell she wanted during our stay here in Barbra.

"Thank you very much for everything you've done, Fran."

"We truly have been in your care."

It took them two whole days, but the twins had managed to calm themselves down. Their expressions were still a bit clouded over, so they hadn't fully recovered, but,

they'd at least regained their smiles.

"I offer you but the most sincere gratitude. We likely would have perished during our travels if not for your advent."

Serid did the same thing the twins had and lowered his head in a deep bow. He'd surprisingly warmed up to us after the whole Sword of Truth incident. Apparently, only only treated us the way he did because he'd thought that we were Salrut's accomplices.

"We will be staying in Barbra for approximately a week. Our place of residence will be the Lord's Manor. Do pay us a visit if you happen to pass by, I am absolutely certain that both Their Highnesses would be extremely pleased to see you."

"Nn. Got it."

"We will make sure to inform the Lord ahead of time so that he knows of the circumstances of your visit."

They're staying over at the local lord's place? Well, gotta give it to them. That's royalty for you.

"I'd like to thank you as well. The trip was really rough, I'm pretty sure you're the only thing that kept us from sinking."

The captain offered us a word of thanks as well.

"Nn."

"Your abilities made this trip much more profitable than it otherwise would have been, so I owe you quite the debt. Make sure to head on over to the Luciel Conglomerate if you ever run into any sort of trouble. We'll do whatever we can for you."

"Don't tel—"

"Yeah, I know. My lips are sealed, and I'll make sure that my men feel the same way."

"Our party feels the same. I will order the soldiers to keep quiet in order to prevent the spread of any undesired rumors."

The whole Sword of Truth business would probably kick up a huge fuss if people ended up finding out about it. It seemed that it was considered really valuable, as both Seird and the captain had asked to purchase it. The former had even offered a whole thirty million Golde.

We'd end up with a huge pain in the ass if rumors of the Sword of Truth spread, so we'd even thrown in a bit of intimidation alongside our request of secrecy. Hopefully, both Serid and Captain Rengil will be able to keep their subordinates in line. Oh well, no choice but to just trust them for now.

Fran exchanged one last handshake with the twins before bidding them farewell.

Alright! I've made up my mind. We'll make sure we drop by at least once, for Fran's sake. Well, assuming that they don't turn as away at the gate, that is.

"Worry not about the document. I shall personally hand it over to Barbra's Lord."

"Thanks."

The document Serid was talking about was the one we found in the illegal slave trader's hideout. We handed it over to him because well, it just kinda made sense for him to have it. He disliked Reidosians, and had enough power to influence most of Kranzel's higher ups. There literally couldn't have been a better person to entrust it to.

"Will be off now."

"Thanks you, and take care of yourself."

"I hope we will meet again in the future."

"Bye bye."

30 Minutes had passed since Fran said her farewells and made her way off the ship.

[That's the place Rengil recommended.]

"Looks expensive."

“Woof.”

[Yeah, it’s supposed to be pretty high class.]

Barbra was really busy given the upcoming festival and whatnot, so we’d been concerned over how much trouble we’d have to go through in order to find a place to stay. Luckily, Captain Rengil had had more than just a few connections, and so, he directed us over to an inn owned by one of his friends. It was a bit pricey, but apparently mentioning the captain’s name would get us a discount. Besides, we had plenty of cash on hand anyways, so we could afford to splurge a bit. The best part about the inn we were recommended was that it allowed familiars, so poor Urushi didn’t have to spend all his time lurking around in Fran’s shadow.

“Hi.”

“Welcome.”

The inn really did give off a high class kind of feel. Instead of being greeted by the usual “well proportioned” old lady type clerk, we were instead received by a dandy-yet-capable looking man.

“Room for one.”

“I’m very sorry, but we don’t have any rooms available at the moment.”

“Nn. Here.”

Fran showed the man coin with the Luciel Conglomerate’s emblem inscribed upon it.

“Well then... Might I ask for the name of the person that introduced you to our establishment?”

“Captain Rengil.”

“I see. Please give me just a moment.”

Showing the man the coin had caused his attitude to take a sudden turn. Apparently, they did actually still have a room, but it was one that they refused to rent out to the general public. They typically had it reserved just in case any of their regulars showed

up. Fortunately, the captain's recommendation gave us the right to use that room as well.

The post-discount price was 4000 Golde per night, and included both breakfast and dinner but not lunch. One night here was literally the same price as ten nights in Alessa, but whatever. We decided to stay for five nights for the time being.

[Alright, looks like we've got ourselves a place to stay. We're pretty much free now, so are you feeling like anything in particular?]

"Food."

"Woof!"

[Sure. Oh yeah, you want to open up the treasure chests we got as bonuses first? I'm kind of curious as to what's inside.]

"Nn. Was looking forward to it."

"Woof!"

CHAPTER 100

REVEALING THE GOODS

[Hmm, it looks like it's locked.]

"Nn."

We were currently inside the room we'd rented.

There was a treasure chest in front of us. Needless to say, it was one of the ones we got from the pirate's base. Its body was made of a blackened iron, and it had the Alchemist's Guild's crest inscribed upon it. We had planned to figure out its contents, but it didn't seem like we would immediately be able to get our hands on the chest's insides because of the mithril padlock attached to the its opening.

[I don't feel any magic coming from the lock itself, but the box has got a spell woven into it. It seems like it's preserving whatever's inside.]

"Then... cut open?"

[I don't think that's a good idea. We don't know what the box contains, so we might end up messing the the contents up if we just hack it open.]

I literally had no idea what was inside. It could be medicine, some sort of raw material, treasure, or maybe even just plain garbage. There was a chance that the items contained within could be really fragile too, meaning that the shock resulting from us breaking the lock open could end up destroying the box's contents.

The other treasure chest we picked up was the type that contained exactly what you'd think it to contain. It was full of all sorts of jewels and accessories. The most expensive looking, and therefore, most interesting of the bunch was a bracelet with a massive gemstone embedded inside of it.

The second box probably contained something just as expensive as well.

"Then what?"

[It might take a while, but my suggestion would be to use Fang of Decay and Fang of Corrosion. That way, we should be able to slowly melt the lock down without damaging the chest's contents...]

"Nn. Sounds bothersome."

"Whimper..."

[Yeah, don't worry about it. I'll do it, so you guys can go eat or something.]

"Nn. Got it."

"Woof woof!"

Wait, wait, isn't this where they're supposed to cut in and say something like, "Let us help, we can't just take it easy while you do all the work?"

Apparently Fran didn't even consider the thought, as she'd already begun stuffing her cheeks with the hamburger steak she grabbed out of the dimensional storage.

Well, I guess it's fine. It means she doesn't really need to hold back around me, and I really do kind of like doing this thing anyway. Plus, doing it by myself lets me focus and relax more.

And so, I began the boring task of melting away at the mithril lock whilst watching over my two companions as they hungrily devoured their lunches. I transformed myself into a saw blade and slowly began to carve away at the padlock while also simultaneously activating both Fang of Decay and Fang of Corrosion.

Soon, the room was filled with not but the sounds of chewing and sawing.

The atmosphere lasted for about ten minutes. It came to an end right when Fran and Urushi were about to go for their fourth helpings; the rhythmic sounding saw noise was disrupted by a loud clink.

[I did it!]

I finally managed to break through the mithril padlock. Man, that was exhausting, I

had to be really careful. But who cares! I managed to get the box open!

“Treasure?”

“Woof?”

[Huh, a bunch of bottles with potions inside them.]

“That’s it?”

[Oh come on, why are you already disappointed? This stuff is actually really amazing, you know?]

“Nn?”

I picked up one of the potions and handed it to Fran. At first glance, it looked like any other Life Portion, but it was a bit more than just that.

“What is it?”

[Apparently it’s the highest grade Life Potion out there.]

“Oh?”

[It’s some really effective stuff. It can even restore missing body parts so long as you don’t get mangled too badly. Apparently people even go as far as to call its effects miraculous.]

“Ohhhh. Sounds amazing.”

“Woof woof!”

They were so potent that you could basically call them elixirs. I remember High Grade Life Potions costing thirty thousand gold apiece, I can’t actually put my finger on exactly how much each of these Highest Grade ones would cost, but I figured it was safe to assume that they were at least a hundred thousand Golde each. We’ve got three bottles in total, so I’d say we raked in a pretty damn good profit.

“Rest are?”

We've still got another 17 bottles left in the chest. I hoped that the other potions would be just as high quality as the first ones we picked up.

"What's this?"

[That's a Full Heal, it removes any and all abnormal status conditions.] ^[1]

Yeah, that one seemed incredibly useful too. Like the Life Pots, they came in a batch of three.

[Let's see, we've also got some high grade mana potions.]

"Total three bottles."

[Let's put one of these in each of our dimensional storage boxes. Put the last one in your potion holder.]

"Got it"

Man, we seriously did strike gold here. These potions could be really useful if we ran into any sort of emergency.

The next three identical looking bottles were apparently Highest Grade Alchemy Potions. I didn't really know what they did, so I guess we should probably ask an alchemist or something later.

I grabbed a black, suspicious looking bottle after putting the Alchemy Potions away.

"Dangerous item?"

[Yeah, make sure you don't touch it.]

"Nn. Got it."

Fran replied with a rare, serious expression on her face.

My Sense of Danger had been going off nonstop for quite some time now, and hence, I didn't even need to appraise the black liquid to know that it was something that shouldn't be touched.

“Woof?”

[Stop that, Urushi.]

“Urushi. Down.”

We didn’t manage to stop Urushi in time, so he ended up giving the bottle a sniff with an intrigued look on his face.

“Whimper!”

A single whiff of the substance caused him to quickly recoil his nose before scratching it nonstop with his front paws. It looked as if the stuff in the bottle stank like hell, hence Urushi’s strong sense of smell had only worked against him.

“Whimper whimper!”

[Well, that’s a Poison Mixture of the Highest Grade for you. Urushi’s more or less down and out just because of its smell.]

We won’t get in trouble just by carrying this around with us... will we? I’m pretty sure it’s more potent than any sort of poison produced through magic. E-Either way, best thing to do is to just seal it away by putting it inside the dimensional storage. I’m actually kinda glad that we’ve only got one of these.

[Alright, next... Woah! This some pretty nice stuff!]

The next potion I grabbed was a Potion of Repair, it was capable of fixing whatever equipment it was poured on. We could use it on either me or Fran’s Black Cat Armour depending on our needs. Too bad we only got one bottle of it. I really wish there was more.

Man, all these decent potions are making this whole thing pretty exciting, it really makes me wonder what’ll come next.

“Pretty.”

[That one looks more gaudy than it does pretty to me.]

Fran had picked up a potion with a bottle slightly more narrow than the rest. Its interior was filled with a sort of sparkling, rainbow liquid. It looked nothing but flashy, however, its effects were pretty damn good. Its name was the Potion of Rising Skill, and as implied, it had the ability to raise the level of one or more skills upon its consumption. The user had no way of choosing which skills would gain levels, and the precise number of skills that did gain levels would also be subject to random chance. We decided to save it for when Fran trained up her skills a bit more, as higher level skills took more effort to level up.

The Potion of Rising Skill was undoubtedly of extremely high value, but even it was considered fairly insignificant when compared to the next thing we identified.

[Holy shit.]

“Nn?”

The next item was called the Anti-Side Effect Potion, and it had the ability to mitigate any negative side effects caused by spells and magic. In other words, it could counteract the backlash that came from skills like Latent Potential Release and Doppelganger Synthesis. If I used it on a clone, then I might even be able to actually eat.

Given its effects, we could probably actually just flat out use it as a trump card. Moreover, it was classified as a “magical medicine” and I didn’t even know those existed. Either way, I want more of these, so I should probably level up Alchemy and Medicine Creation some more. I should be able to make these myself one day if I get both those skills high enough.

There were only two bottles left in the chest, but both were so rare that I couldn’t actually figure out what they did. Appraisal refused to tell me more than just their names.

The two bottles were identified as the Drug of Reversed Attributes, and the Root of Arcane Souls respectively. The former looked like any other potion, so we might’ve actually just accidentally downed it not for appraisal. [2]

The latter looked just like an empty bottle, but the fact that a name showed up when I appraised it meant that there was definitely something inside. Was it gas or

something? I didn't really think opening it was a good idea, so we refrained.

Oh well, whatever. Either way, that was it. To sum things up, the results were as follows.

Highest Grade Life Potion 3
Full Heal 3 [2]
High Grade Mana Potion 3
Highest Grade Alchemy Potion 3
Poison Mixture of the Highest Grade 1
High Grade Potion of Repair 1
Potion of Rising Skill 1
Anti-Side Effect Potion 3
Drug of Reversed Attributes 1
Root of Arcane Souls 1

Wow, we really struck it rich. The potions looked to be worth more than a million Golde in total, and we could actually put most of them to use if we wanted.

We should probably get the ones we didn't know much about checked out. Barbra was a pretty big city. Naturally, it contained a fair number of alchemists therewithin, so we should be able to find someone that knows all our portions' effects.

That said, I couldn't help but feel as if asking around about this stuff would stir up a huge fuss, so it'd be best for us to be prudent. It's not like we're in any sort of rush here anyways.

"Then, ask adventurer's guild?"

[Yeah, that sounds like a pretty good idea. We need to sell all the magic beast parts we dismantled on our way here too, so yeah, let's head right on over.]

"Nn. Wanted to see city anyway."

"Woof woof woof!"

"Urushi. Want to walk around town too?"

"Woof!"

The first thing he wanted to do after going somewhere new was to go out on a walk. That's a dog for you I guess. Well, it's fine though. I kind of wanted to see the city's sights myself, so we might as well just explore the place while looking for the Adventurer's Guild.

[Alright, a walk it is then.]

“Nn.”

“Woof woof!”

CHAPTER 101

THE CHEF'S GUILD

Discounting the Royal Capital, Barbra was Kranzel's largest city. Like Dharz, it bordered the sea, and thus, function as a large, commercial centre.

The city was so extravagantly decorated that even the guard's office was a shocking 4 stories in height. Salrut was still accompanying the prince on his travels, albeit as a prisoner, but the pirates? Yeah, they were probably pretty much all locked up inside. Chances were, they were going to be hanged in a few days time. We technically didn't break the promise we made to the pirate's captain, as we weren't going to kill him ourselves. They were just being punished for being a bunch of unruly pirates, nothing less, nothing more.

Barbra's port was massive. It housed over a hundred ships hailing from at least twenty different countries. It was such a well travelled place that it'd probably be safe to say that you could get your hands on anything you ever wanted here so long as you were willing to pay the price.

"Amazing."

"Woof."

[Woah. There's so many shops that I can't decide where to start.]

The street leading to and from the port was lined with stalls and shops of all shapes and sizes.

There were three different weapon shops within 200 meters of us, but a certain pair of gluttons had already dismissed them without so much as a second thought. Instead, they were looking towards the myriad of restaurants that decorated the crowded street, their eyes shining like stars in the night sky.

At the time, I figured that there wasn't any issue in letting the two of them eat whatever they wanted. We had the money, so whatever.

Little did I know at the time, that decision had been nothing short of a mistake.

“Tasty.”

“Woof!”

“Also tasty.”

“Woof woof!”

“Nom nom nom.”

“Bark.”

It looked to me like the two of them were spending more time with their mouths stuffed than they were the opposite. Both Fran and Urushi were both holding and eating as much food as they possibly could, and needless to say, the sight of a young girl and a large black wolf shoving meal after meal down their throats was something that stood out far more than necessary. In fact, they drew so much attention that the people around us had actively started to observe our every move. They even gave Fran a round of applause after seeing her eat an entire giant skewer in a single bite.

Our food filled advance eventually led us to a massive square about five hundred meters in diameter.

The buildings constructed around said square were on a similarly grand scale; they were both massive and gaudy as could be. Their very existences served to function as a testament to their owners’ wealth. If I had to give an impression of the area, I’d say that it hit me in much in the same way as would a place like Marunouchi or Time Square. Examining the plaza further led my eyes to catch ahold of something that immediately grabbed my interest.

[Is that what I think it is...?]

(Master?)

[Apparently that building over there is labeled as the Chef’s Guild.]

I didn’t even know that such a thing actually existed. I couldn’t help but find myself

staring at it in wonder, I really wanted to find out more about its activities and stuff.

“Want to go?”

[Yeah. Please and thanks.]

There were a lot of other big names hanging around, like the Blacksmith’s Guild and the Merchant’s Guild, just to name a few. I even caught sight of a few embassies as well. It was almost as if there was an invisible rule stating every institution located within the square was an organisation or entity that carried with it a certain degree of prestige, and I saw no reason for the Chef’s Guild to be an exception thereto.

“Here?”

[Yeah, but it looks like Urushi won’t be allowed inside.]

A sign saying “Pets and familiars are not allowed within the premises,” was hanging from the guild’s door. Well, I guess it can’t be helped, given how food was involved.

(Then sink into shadow?)

[Yeah, should work. Make sure you don’t come out of Fran’s shadow while we’re still inside, okay, Urushi?]

(Whimper...)

Urushi let out a slightly saddened cry before obediently sinking into Fran’s shadow. He was probably hoping to enter the Chef’s Guild so he could get his paws on something tasty. We’ll have to make it up to him later.

“Hello.”

The Chef’s Guild’s interior design greatly resembled that of the Adventurer’s Guild. The only major difference that one could spot at first glance was that the people within the building were chefs instead of adventures.

“And what can we for you today, young lady?”

“Nothing in particular.”

“Huh?”

Fran’s exhibition of complete and brutal honesty left the guild’s clerk in a momentary state of bewilderment. That said, she did manage to recover from it quite quickly.

“First time here.”

“We don’t have too many branches, so I can understand where you’re coming from. We, the Chef’s Guild, facilitate the gathering of ingredients from across the entire continent. Many chefs even go as far as to equate the guild to the heavens. We have many connections with those within the industry, and there is a rather large demand for our services.”

The Guild’s receptionist was politely answering Fran’s questions despite the fact that she was just a child. She informed us that the Chef’s Guild effectively functioned as a large merchant that worked with both ingredients and chefs themselves. The guild would accept registration from two different types of individuals. The first was obviously chefs and the second, the owners of businesses that required them. The guild started out as a small organisation focused around the discovery of new recipes, and it has followed through with that fundamental philosophy throughout its history. Even now, the guild apparently continued to extend its arms to any and all chefs in need of support.

“Are you perhaps a chef yourself?”

“Kind of?”

Fran was stuck in a weird situation in which she never actually cooked despite her cooking skill completely maxed out.

“Master, good at cooking.”

“I see. And I take it that your Master is not one of our guild’s members?”

“Nn.”

“I believe that registering may be in your Master’s best interest. We provide a wide variety of benefits, especially in the realm of buying and selling recipes and

ingredients.”

Oh, that’s pretty interesting, but I’m kind of a sword, so I can’t actually register myself. Fran could probably do it, but she’s a part of the Adventurer’s Guild as well, so I wasn’t really sure if she was disallowed or something as a result.

“Oh, don’t worry about that. A fair number of our members are in that precise situation; they belong to several guilds simultaneously. That said, I do have to say that the Chef’s Guild isn’t nearly as big as the Adventurer’s Guild, and unlike the Adventurer’s Guild, we don’t intentionally restrict our members in any which way. The Chef’s Guild is much more lax in general, as fundamentally, we stemmed from an organisation established for the sole sake of helping one another.”

“Want to register?”

“Are you legally authorized to do business in Barbra?”

“Nn? No.”

“In that case, you’ll have to register as a chef.”

“Okay.”

“You will have to participate in an examination. Is that okay?”

“Exam? What kind?”

“Well, we are the Chef’s Guild, so you’ll have to cook. We’ll consider you have to passed the examination if you can get our staff judges to approve of any one of your dishes. We have a kitchen available if you’d like to whip something up right away, but using it isn’t mandatory. If you want, you can cook something up ahead of time and then just bring it on over.”

Does that mean that I can make something and then get Fran register for me by proxy?

“Yes, that would be fine. Our guild cards don’t require anything beyond just a name.”

Wow, they really were lax. The word guild always made me think of something really systematic and strict, but apparently the Chef’s Guild wasn’t like that at all. Signing up

here seemed almost as casual as signing up for any sort of membership or point card back in Japan.

“Something already made okay for exam?”

“Well, yes, but...”

“Then this. And this.”

“Huh? Oh, I see, you had an item box.”

Fran had pulled out from her dimensional storage a serving of curry and a skewer made of wild boar meat. Their spices’ fragrances drifted across the room and grabbed the attention of all the chefs there within.

Fran actually did make the skewer herself, so we technically weren’t cheating.

[I know that they’re going to be judging us, but are you sure you want to offer them curry? That’s one less plate for you, you know?]

The hell is going on here? She normally hates sharing her curry.

(Masters cooking will be judged. Can’t show inferior products. Need to blow judges out of the water.)

[O-Oh I see. Thanks.]

“I-I’ll go get an examiner right away.”

“Nn? You’re not a judge?”

“The higher ups are supposed to participate in the judging just to make sure all our members meet the same standard of quality.”

Five minutes later, the receptionist came back with a man in tow. If I had to sum said man up, I’d say he more or less looked like a gourmet that was nothing short of difficult to please. He was totally rocking the Kaibara Y*zan and Aji*u feel. Just seeing him kind of made me start to feel nervous.

“Oh? So you’re the applicant?”

“Nn. This, my cooking.”

“Grilled meat on a skewer? Hmm... I see. Well then, I’ll give it a sample.”

The man took a bite out of the skewer. He slowly chewed through it and savoured its flavour before finally swallowing it with a gulp. The fact that he stayed expressionless throughout the whole process left me feeling a bit intimidated.

“Hmm... It’s quite plain.”

“Can’t be helped.”

Fran had a pretty solid grasp of where her own cooking skills laid, so she didn’t really get angry despite the fact that they were criticized. She only made the dish on a whim anyways.

“However, I can’t say I disapprove of its flavour. I can feel your fervor and passionate temperament through its taste. It’s as if the dish itself is telling me that you tried to make it as delicious as possible with what limited materials you had access to.

“Nn?”

Wow, he actually knows what he’s talking about. The skewer he was eating was indeed something that Fran made on a whim, but that didn’t mean she didn’t give it her all.

It was a dish that she carefully roasted with fire magic over the course of about thirty minutes. She didn’t use any special ingredients or spices to make it either, she just grabbed whatever she happened to have available and gave it her best effort. Despite her relative lack of ingredients, she took her time and managed to make the final product taste pretty good. However, it was also actually this precise careful process that caused her to lose interest in cooking, as she ended up equating it to a meticulous and almost painful process.

The examiner had been so skillful and observant that he was able to deduce her efforts but from a single bite. Seriously, wow.

“I approve of your dish, you pass.”

“Nn.”

Whew, she passed. Given how Fran managed to pass with nothing but a skewer of meat, I figured that I shouldn't have any issues passing either. That said, I didn't really think that there was any point in having me register anymore, as we'd already secured the benefits we needed.

(No. Can't not register.)

[Why not?]

(Make them eat Master's cooking. Blow their minds.)

It seemed like she didn't actually care about the benefits, she just wanted to completely bewilder the stuck-up looking judge by feeding him a plateful of curry.

“Next, this.”

“What an interesting dish. Its appearance reminds me Azerian cuisine, but its fragrance is of a much more mellow quality, and its ingredients stray from the Azerian norm.”

“Called curry. Made by Master.”

“So I take it that this is one of your Master's original creations?”

“Yes. The ultimate dish, crafted from years of blood and effort.”

What, no! Nonononono! All I did was reproduce one of Earth's most common dishes! It's nothing complicated, and I only decided to make it because it's easy given that we had all the necessary spices on hand!

“Oh? I look forward to trying it then.”

“Tastiest thing in the world is curry.”

“I would be quite glad if that were to be the truth.”

The old gourmet judge raised the dish to his mouth and consumed a bite after listening to Fran hype it up.

“Oh?”

“Tasty.”

“Hmm...”

“Ultimate dish.”

Fran couldn't stand just watching, so she pulled out another plate and began eating it alongside the judge whilst watching him with a look of confidence. Her expression gave way to the fact that she was absolutely sure he would be blown away by the flavour.

“It's not bad.”

“Nn. Of course.”

“But did you really think that a dish with this meager a flavour would stand above else all that the world has to offer?”

The moment the man uttered his response, Fran completely froze over.

“Hah?”

Her expression vanished altogether, and she immediately began to radiate an aura of violent bloodlust.

CHAPTER 102

WAIT, WE SKIPPED THE FIRST ROUND ALTOGETHER?

Hearing the gourmet criticize her favourite dish caused Fran to emit far more bloodthirst than she had ever displayed on the battlefield.

She further went on to activate her Intimidation skill and funneled both it and entirety of her bloodlust towards the judge. I was pretty worried for the guy. There was so much pressure that an ordinary civilian would likely have passed out, pissed themselves, or maybe even something worse than prior options combined.

“Curry. Tastiest thing ever.”

“Well, I do admit that it is quite delicious, but it’s most definitely not the most delicious thing in the world.”

Holy crap. Dude looks like he’s a middle aged man, but damn, he’s got balls. Fran’s thirst for blood didn’t make him even anywhere close to fainting. In fact, he just casually raised an eyebrow whilst responding to her as if it wasn’t a big deal at all. And I don’t mean that he’s just naturally the calm type of guy or anything like that either. He wasn’t half assing it and just throwing up a front, and he wasn’t just naturally unconcerned with this type of thing, he genuinely just didn’t care.

I guess that’s just how people who’ve mastered their trades end up turning out, regardless of what those trades happen to be.

[Fran, calm down.]

(Already calm!)

[I’m only telling you to calm down because you’re clearly agitated. Why don’t you just ask him why he feels the way he does? You might be able to accept his thoughts once you come to understand them, so let go of me already!]

“Nn. Why?”

She asked the question in a bit of an egotistical tone. It looked like Fran had already

started to think of him as a sort of enemy. I just hope that she doesn't actually attack him.

"The taste of the dish itself serves to prove that it is near completion. There is little room left for the improvement of its flavour, and it carries with it a unique fragrance the likes of which I myself had never before sampled. I will admit that it was very well crafted. However, that is all. This dish completely fails to provide with it its creator's dignity!"

"Dignity?"

"Dignity refers to the chef's spirit, their passion and pride. Dignity is something that all chefs carry with them at all times, it's what must be poured into their craft. This dish lacks even the slightest sense of dictinity. It was made with care, but it fails to extend beyond the realm of one's home cooking."

You know, he is actually right. All I wanted was to make Fran food that she'd find delicious, and I never really shot for anything more than just that. I ended up making it all en masse, and I was honestly only careful enough to make sure that it didn't burn. I never really thought of making the best dish ever or anything like that at all.

In other words, the final product was basically a dish made by an amateur that just so happened to have the skill required to cook. Yeah, this dude, he really knows his stuff. I almost can't believe that he was able to see through me with such ease. Fran seems to think of him as a sort of enemy, but I don't really feel any hostility towards him at all. In fact, I'd say that I think he's a pretty cool guy.

"Grrr."

Fran grumbled in response to the man's words.

"Well, either way, a pass is a pass. I will admit the person you call your Master to the guild, though I have very few expectations of him."

"Will not acknowledge."

"Oh?"

"Curry is the best. Absolute best. Next time, will make you admit it."

“That’s an interesting remark. However, I’m quite a bit busier than I look. You won’t be able to get me to show up whenever you so please, especially seeing as how I’m going to be even busier than usual starting tomorrow.”

“Mrrrgghhh”

Eh, we got a pass, so whatever. It doesn’t really matter anymore, does it?

(It does!)

[It can’t really be helped. He’s got things to do too.]

(Curry is best food. Refuse to acknowledge any other. Need to prove.)

[Well, alright. If that’s what you want.]

“How to meet with you?”

“Hmm... Well, if you’d like me to evaluate another dish, then why not register for this?”

“Nn.”

The middle aged man of a gourmet handed Fran a single pamphlet, the headline of which was “King of Cooking – A Contest Sponsored by Barbra’s Chef’s Guild.”

According to the pamphlet, the first round allowed you to bring your food in ahead of time for it to be judged. The second round was a competition based on food carts. The last round and climax was supposed to be a match between the finalist’s best dishes.

“We’re currently in the midst of the first round. The dish’s taste and uniqueness justifies it passing through to the second. If you can make it all the way to the end, then you’ll be able to force me to try your cooking. I will be the sole judge of the final round.”

“Will participate!”

[Wait a sec! At least say something to me before you just go off and declare that!]

The second round consists of setting up a food cart, and Fran isn’t exactly what you’d

call a model salesgirl. Besides, the old dude isn't actually going to be sampling anything until the finals, and it wouldn't make sense for me to not actually show up to the finals in person. Fran herself can't make curry, so I'd probably have to unless she was planning to learn how to make it? I doubt we'd be able to pull any sort of trick given his sense of taste, and this really isn't something that can be even remotely close to brute forced.

(Will definitely participate.)

[All the people who enter are going to be people who are good at cooking. Do you really think we'll be able to make it to the finals?]

(No worries. Master can definitely make it.)

[I'm happy to hear you say that, but...]

Honestly, I don't think that the idea of making it all the way to the finals is all that realistic. A good chunk of the participants were probably people who'd been chefs for over a decade, and I figured that it'd be fair to conclude that most of them were pretty damned good at what they did.

(Refuse to back off or lose. Curry equals pride.)

[I get what you're trying to say, but...]

I honestly had no self confidence whatsoever.

(No worries. I believe in you, Master.)

[I really don't feel like I can do it. I mean, I have the skill maxed, but deep down, I'm honestly just an amateur.]

(Don't believe in my sense of taste?)

[Well, I mean, I do.]

Fran really likes eating. The max level cooking skill we share only helps to amplify her sense of taste even further, so, she definitely knows what tastes good and what doesn't, and she isn't the type to flatter. Her thoughts and impressions are genuine and her

opinion has weight to it.

The issue wasn't actually related to any of that. All my problems came from that whole best in the world thing. I myself was having some trouble picturing curry as the world's best ever creation.

(Then, believe in the me that believes in you, Master.)

[That was a pretty good line you said just now.]

God damn. That was number three on the list of things I really wanted to say at least once. Man, I'm jealous! Why did she get to say it! Argggg, Fran is terrifying at times like these.

[Alright, alright. If you're going as far as to say something like that, then I can't really say no to you.]

(Then participating is okay?)

[Yeah, let's go get ourselves that championship.]

(Yes Master.)

"What's wrong? Lost your nerves?"

"Nope. Just getting fired up. Will definitely win."

"So you will be participating then?"

"Nn!"

"Then read over the rules and sign them."

The old man then called over one of the people in charge of the competition and had them explain any relevant details to us.

The first round had over 2000 participants, but only twenty would move on to the second. We were pretty lucky to be instantly selected as one of said twenty.

The second round was to last three days, and its whole premise was to see who could profit the most by wheeling a cart around and selling food. All the entrants were given a hundred thousand Golde as their starting capital. The sheer amount of money given to each individual really served to evidence that the contest's scale.

You were allowed to bring your own ingredients if you wanted as well. Apparently that rule was made because some of the chefs would only work with super high end stuff, and a hundred thousand Golde wasn't anywhere close enough to what they needed to get going.

The only condition was that you needed to tell the contest's staff ahead of time. The ingredient cost was still going to be detracted from one's profits regardless, so it didn't actually really work to create any advantages for those that had their own stuff. After all, the point wasn't just to sell as much as possible, it was to profit as much as possible.

The four chefs with the best profits would be able to move on to the competition's final round, in which they'd each present their very best dishes.

The winner would be rewarded a hundred thousand Golde. Honestly, the prize money alone wasn't all that appealing. It was literally exactly the same amount as what was given for the second round's preparations. But to the chefs, that was fine. What mattered was the honor and fame that came with one's victory, not the immediate monetary gain. Those that won would ultimately prosper down the road anyways due to the prestige that came with the event. Many of the competition's previous winners had even been granted positions in which they answered directly to royalty.

"The second round will begin in three days, and the finals on the 7th of April."

The Lunar Banquet was set to span a week starting on the 31st, meaning that the finals would take place on its last day.

"Will you be able to complete all necessary preparations in time for the event?"

(Master?)

[It should be fine. We'll manage one way or another.]

"Nn. No problems at all."

“Very well. Then here is one hundred thousand gold. Use it to ready yourself for the second round, and don’t be making off with it.”

“Won’t. You, get noose ready, await your loss.”

“I’ll be looking forward to seeing the results of your efforts.”

“Nn!”

And so, we somehow ended up participating in a cooking contest.

We needed a kitchen in which we could operate. They said that we could always just use the one they had here, but that would mean people seeing me in action, which wasn’t exactly a good thing. We needed a place in which we could maintain secrecy whilst preparing our dishes. I also need to think about the type of curry I was going to make, so we could get all our supplies ready. Luckily, we still had a tonne of spices on hand.

There was, however, a problem. We still had a mountain load of stuff to do in the meantime. We needed to drop in on the Adventurer’s guild, find a knowledgeable alchemist, and even visit the twins sometime or another.

I know I said that we’d manage somehow, but man, it really seems like we’re not going to have enough time for all this...

CHAPTER 103

COLBERT

We arrived at the Adventurer's Guild about an hour after signing up for the cooking contest.

I'd wanted to explore the town a bit more, but we didn't have the time for that. We had to quickly get everything over with so I could find a place to cook.

[Alright, let's hurry up and sell everything. Once we get that done, we should be able to ask them if they happen to know where we could find information on alchemy. If we're lucky, they might also be able to help us find a location in which we can cook in private.]

"Nn."

[You don't mind if we hold onto the silver, gold, and gems for now, right?]

I was planning keeping them for the time being just in case we happened to run into a situation in which we couldn't use Golde.

"Guild over there?"

[Seems like it... Wait, holy crap, it's massive!]

"Really big."

"Woof."

Alessa's Guild was pretty big already, but Barbra's was on a whole 'nother scale. The building was so large and fancy that I almost mistook it for a noble's manor.

"Castle?"

[It really does look like one.]

But surely enough, a sign indicating that this was indeed the Adventurer's Guild was hanging up atop the building's entrance.

The guild's exterior was gorgeous, but its inside? Not so much. If anything, they almost seemed shoddy in comparison. Well, I guess it did make sense. Not all adventurers were lawful people. In fact, a fairly significant portion were precisely the opposite, and hence, it was always possible for fancy furniture to get damaged or even stolen.

There were seven different desks and at least fifty adventurers within the building as we entered it. At first, I'd thought that there was some sort of emergency gathering or something, but apparently this was normal. Understanding that fact really made me come to see the Barbra branch's scale.

"Welcome, is this your first time here?"

"Nn."

"Would you like me to quickly go over everything then?"

"Please."

"Alright, in that case, I'll first tell you about the different counters and their purposes. You're currently standing at the information desk. Here, we provide with information about the guild and its facilities. We can also help if you wish to contact any specific individuals within the building."

Apparently the three counters beside us were all for handling requests, and the other three were for the purchasing and exchange of materials.

The upper floors contained a sort of library filled with reference materials alongside an office for the guild's staff. There were even a bunch of facilities for people new to the industry, they had training rooms and extra bedrooms too. The rooms were apparently really small, so I doubted that we'd get any use out of them, but newbies would probably be happy just to have them.

"Large building. Reasons now clear."

"So what did you need?"

“Nn. Want to sell materials.”

“Do you have an adventurer’s card?”

“Here.”

“Just give me a moment to run it through the necessary checks.”

I was expecting the receptionist to do the usual thing and react to the discrepancy between Fran’s rank and age, but she didn’t.

“Fran, D ranked adventurer, is it? Okay, please proceed to the desk labeled with the number 6.”

“Nn.”

In fact, her expression didn’t change at all. She simply did her job pointed Fran in the right direction without any sort of hassle. I think this is actually the first time this has happened to us. I really got to give it to the Barbra branch, they trained their employees pretty damn well.

The receptionist at the purchasing counter was the same. She also just casually did her job without showing the slightest bit of shock or surprise.

At first, I thought I liked their attitudes, but further exposure led me to feel like they were acting *too* calm. Their complete lack of a reaction left me feeling a bit unsatisfied.

The adventurers around us provided a much more normal reaction. Unlike the receptionists, they immediately kicked up a commotion the moment Fran pulled the Dreadnought Destroyer’s horn out of storage.

In the end, we managed to get fifty thousand Golde out of all the stuff we gathered while we were out at sea. Most of what we picked up was rather cheap, the only item with a notable price was the Dreadnought Destroyer’s horn, as it could be used in the crafting of weapons. The receptionist asked if we would like to sell the rest of the Dreadnought Destroyer as well, but we ended up turning her down. Fran liked how the Dreadnought Destroyer tasted, and both its flesh and bones could be used to make food.

A male adventurer approached the desk right as we were getting paid.

General Information

Name: Colbert

Age: 38

Race: Human

Job: Iron Fist Warrior

State: Normal

Status Level: 41/99

HP: 428

MP: 202

STR: 249

VIT: 154

AGI: 203

INT: 91

MGC: 101

DEX: 189

Skills

Hand to Hand Combat: Lv 6

Martial Arts: Lv 6

Crisis Detection: Lv 3

Divine Fist Arts: Lv 2

Fist Techniques: Lv 9

Fist Arts: Lv: MAX

Combat Qigong: Lv 4

Herculean Strength: Lv 6

Blink: Lv 7

Swimming: Lv 4

Ocean Resistance: Lv 2

Throwing: Lv 4

Life Magic: Lv 3

Drowsiness Resistance: Lv 3

Paralysis Resistance: Lv 4

Cooking: Lv 2

Hawk Eyes

Beast Killer

Minor Strength Boost

Vigour Manipulation

Inherent Skills

Iron Fist

Titles

Bear Killer

Tiger Killer

Equipment

Water Dragon Leather Gloves

Old Water Tiger's Martial Arts Uniform

Old Water Tiger's Martial Arts Shoes

Red Helmet Bear Bandana

Red Helmet Bear Mantle

Bracelet of Pain Resistance

Bracelet of Impact Resistance

He looked pretty strong. He wasn't as strong as Jean, but his stats were higher than Donadorondo's, so he was probably at least a C rank.

That Qigong skill of his looked pretty interesting. Apparently, it used magical power in order to strengthen a part of one's body. In other words, it was a skill applicable both in offense and defense. It allowed him to fight against bladed weapons with just his bare hands.

His Iron Fist skill caught my eye as well. The combination of that skill and his ability to use martial arts looked like they worked pretty well together. I really wanted to see him in action; I could already imagine a manga-like scene playing out in my head.

"Hey there little miss. Did you catch that all by yourself?"

His choice of words made it seem like he was trying to mock Fran, but neither his tone nor expression gave off that sort of impression at all. It looked like he was honestly curious as to whether or not she'd defeated the Dreadnought Destroyer all by her lonesome.

"Nn. Fished it."

"What? You fished it?"

"Fished during boat trip."

"That's amazing! People normally beat them by bombarding them with magic."

Huh, I thought he was going to get suspicious, but he actually straight up just believed us.

“Believe me?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, of course. I mean, anyone that isn’t blind can tell at a glance that you’re pretty skilled just based on how you move your feet and how you carry yourself.”

Several adventurers averted their gazes in embarrassment in response to Colbert’s words. Looks like we’ve got a few people in need of guide dogs around these parts.

“Dreadnought Destroyers are one of my favourite foods, but they’re fairly rare, so it’s quite hard for me to get my hands on them. Would you mind selling me a bit of its meat? If you fished it, then you probably have quite the amount.”

“Won’t sell.”

“Have you already arranged to have it sold elsewhere?”

“Nn? Will eat myself.”

“All of it?”

“Nn.”

“I see... What a shame...”

The man responded with a disappointed frown, it seemed like he really wanted to eat Dreadnought Destroyer. I couldn’t help but feel a bit sorry for him. He did recognize Fran’s abilities, so I didn’t really see much harm in sharing a slight bit with him.

Fran pulled something out from her storage space and held it in front the man right as I finished thinking the thought through.

“Here. Will give this. Dreadnought Destroyer nigirizushi.”

She gave him a small box of sushi with soy sauce already dribbled all over its contents. It was one of the ones I prepared while we were still on the ship, and it was made so that it could be eaten at any given time. The box’s exterior almost perfectly resembled

the containers that I always saw drunk salarymen carrying around.

[You sure you're okay with that? Didn't you really like sushi?]

(Can't be helped. For publicity.)

[Publicity? What?]

"Did you make that?"

"Nn. Master made it."

Well, technically, I borrowed her body in order to make them, so she could've just said that she made them herself.

"I've never seen anything prepared like this before. You said it was called nigirizushi?"

"Nn."

Colbert timidly took a piece of sushi out of the box Fran presented to him and threw it in his mouth after a moment of hesitation.

"Chew chew chew."

"Nom nom nom."

Fran followed up on his action by stuffing three pieces into her own mouth immediately.

"H-How delicious! What delectable taste! J-Just what is this!? It's far more than just a slice of meat placed atop a portion of rice! In fact, the fish itself can't even be said to have simply been sliced! The sharpness of the blade used managed to completely sever each piece without crushing even the slightest bit of the flesh. The complete lack of deterioration resulting from the Dreadnought's Destroyer's careful dissection drew out every single last bit of its flavour! And the rice, the rice is more than just a bundle of carbohydrates squished together to form a shape! The slightly acidic substance added to the grains in the careful compression process melts in your mouth and causes its deliciousness to spread throughout the entirety of my being. This dish functions to define the very meaning of fine cuisine. You called it... nigirizushi? Yes,

yes, I see! The very act of molding the the rice is none other than an iterative refinement of the cooking process as a whole.” [1]

Er, holy crap. He just ended up making a speech. I mean, I saw that he had the skill required to cook, so I figured he’d probably be interested in the dish, but man, I did not expect *that*. Both him and the judge guy we ran into earlier really liked to give their impressions of the stuff we made. Is everyone in Barbra like this? I really hope I don’t get used to being around this type of person.

“Y-Young lady, you said that your master was the one who made the dish?”

“Nn.”

“He must be this world’s greatest chef... Does he perhaps own a restaurant?”

Colbert suddenly started speaking in a super polite fashion.

“No.”

“Then, is he currently employed by another?”

“No.”

“Then wherever will I have to venture to consume another one of the Master’s dishes?”

“Will have a cart for the cooking contest.”

“I see! So that means that he’s already completed the first round. But of course he would, his skills are simply sublime. But thank you, I will make sure I visit on at least one occasion. Rather, I will visit him on every possible occasion. What sort of dish exactly is he preparing for the competition?”

“Curry.”

“I’ve never even heard of it. W-Would it happen to be another one of the Master’s original recipes?”

“Yup.”

“Amazing! I simply cannot wait to discover its flavour!”

Ohhhh, so this is what Fran was aiming for. She managed to get a high ranked adventurer to stir up a commotion in order to provide us with what was basically an advertisement. I have to admit, that was pretty good scheme right there.

“Right, I should introduce myself. I’m a B ranked adventurer, they call me Ironclaw Colbert.”

“Ironclaw?”

“Yeah, that’s my alias. As of the moment, I still fail to match up to people like Amanda of Hariti, Hundredblade Forrund, or Jean Dovy the Annihilator. However, one day, I’ll be famous enough for my name to be known throughout the land.”

Aliases were a thing? Oh, right, I remember now. People used to call Fran the Magical Sword Girl, and I did know about Amanda’s whole Hariti thing as well. I mean, hers fit her perfectly. She liked kids so much that she was on the verge of having some sort of disorder. I never would’ve imagined Jean having the alias The Annihilator though. It seemed a bit too violent for him.

“D rank adventurer. Fran.”

“Oh? You’re a D rank? It looks like you’ll turn out quite promising later on down the road. Anyways, I really need to thank you for sharing your nigrizushi with me. It was so delicious that I can’t help but feel like it changed my life in its entirety.”

“Understanding value of nigrizushi means insightful. Very promising.”

“Hahaha. Thanks, thanks. You must be quite the chef yourself given your Master’s skill, so hearing your praise makes me feel a slight bit embarrassed.”

The two exchanged a firm handshake. It looked like they got along pretty well with one another.

“Don’t hesitate to let me know if you ever need any help. I’ve actually got quite a bit of influence, so I can say for sure that I won’t let you down. I’d be very much honoured if said help ended up benefitting your Master as well.”

And so, I randomly managed to get myself a fan. He seems like he's a pretty good guy too.

Meeting him made me realize that all the high ranked adventurers were actually a bit weird and quirky. I really have to make sure Fran learns all about common sense before she ends like them. Though, to do that, I'd probably have to learn more about this world's common sense myself first.

CHAPTER 104

EUGENE

We headed over to the guild's third floor after getting paid.

After selling materials, we had asked the guild if they knew any alchemists that could give us a hand, and apparently, they knew just the guy. The guild's Barbra branch had contracted a fairly skilled alchemist to work within it, and he happened to be present, so we decided to pay him a visit right away.

We were guided to our destination by an elf. Though she was apparently 50 years old, she looked like she was in her late teens or early twenties. The door she knocked on had a sign on it describing it as "Eugene's Laboratory," and it was located in an area that seemed to contain facilities that one would use to produce all sorts of different items and consumables.

"Come in."

"Please excuse our intrusion."

Inside the room was a single man with his arms outstretched. He was at the age where his hair had started to grey, but despite that, he wore it with a swept back style and allowed it to grow to such a length that it extended all the way down to his back. His thin but tall body was decorated with a loose robe, and his face a gentle smile. The round glasses atop his nose really worked well the rest of his image and assisted in giving him him an intellectual sort of feel.

His eyes were a bit weird though, the whites were black, and the irises green. It also looked like there was some feeler-like thingy growing out of his receding hairline.

"Good afternoon Dr. Eugene, I've brought someone that wanted to see you."

"Oh? What a cute little lady we have here. Are you an adventurer?"

"Nn. D rank adventurer. Fran."

“D rank? That’s quite impressive.”

General Information

Name: Eugene

Age: 62

Race: Half Bugman (Bee tribe)

Job: Alchemy Instructor

State: Normal

Status Level: 55

HP: 209

MP: 596

STR: 101

VIT: 108

AGI: 159

INT: 359

MGC: 220

DEX: 333

Skills

Cast Time Reduction: Lv 3

Wind Magic: Lv 2

Appraisal: Lv 8

Harvest: Lv 7

Woodland Resistance: Lv 3

Life Magic: Lv 5

Short Spear Arts: Lv 5

Short Spear Techniques: Lv 2

Throwing: Lv 7

Knowledge of Poisons: Lv 8

Toxicology: Lv 9

Fire Magic: Lv 3

Water Magic: Lv 5

Medicinal Herbology: Lv 7

Knowledge of Medicinal Herbs: Lv 5

Resistance to Molten Iron: Lv 6

Alchemy: MAX

Transmutation: Lv 5

Poison Invalidation

Paralysis Invalidation

Magic Manipulation

Greater Intelligence Boost

Innate Skills

Presence Detection: Lv 3

Poison Production: Lv 4

Poison Spray: Lv 1

Titles

Item Expert

Master of Poison

Master of Potions

Master Alchemist

Equipment

Magic Stone Cane Spear

Dark God's Alloy Threaded Robe

Shoes of Walking on Water

Bracelet of Dexterity

Bracelet of Storage

He was a bugman, the insect equivalent of a beastman. His appearance led me to assume that bugmen were likely characterized by their eyes and antennas. That said, he was technically only a half blood, meaning he didn't exhibit all the traits that'd normally be associated with bugmen. Still, his outward appearance was unique enough for me to make me really curious as to how full fledged bugmen looked.

But oh well, whatever. His appearance wasn't important. What mattered was that he actually seemed just as skilled as the guild had said he was. His titles were self evident, and further proof of his abilities was provided by the fact that he'd not only completely maxed out alchemy, but even moved on to leveling up transmutation. Based on what I read in the skill description, transmutation was to alchemy what divine sword arts were to regular sword arts, a flat out improvement. There was also the whole characterization that he had going for him. It practically screamed master alchemist at the top of its lungs.

"Okay, why don't I introduce myself? My name is Eugene, an alchemist that has contracted the entirety of his services to the Adventurer's Guild."

"Not in Alchemist's Guild?"

"Hahaha, I did used to be a part of it, however, one of my disciples had ended up causing a scandal, so I had to take responsibility for his actions and resign from my position. I was picked up by the Adventurer's Guild shortly after."

“It’s not the Doctor’s fault at all though. The apprentice that caused the scandal was one that’d already left his care.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that he committed a crime through the application knowledge he obtained from my teachings.”

“I still think that the Alchemist’s Guild went too far. It really didn’t merit confiscating your membership.”

The elf replied to Eugene’s acceptance of his punishment with an unhappy look on her face.

“Doctor. Leaving Alchemist’s Guild for Adventurer’s Guild. Didn’t cause bad blood?”

Fran’s doubt was a sensible one. Most people probably wouldn’t exactly be what you’d call happy if someone they kicked out immediately managed to find their way into another organisation.

“It definitely did. The Alchemist’s Guild’s last Guild Master harassed me every single day until he retired.”

“I think the current Guild Master took up his position about five years ago. He’s not nearly as extreme as the last one.”

“That isn’t to say that there isn’t any sort of residual resentment anymore though. Many alchemists still feel hostility towards adventurers.”

Apparently, Eugene’s recruitment had even damaged the relationship between the two guilds.

“Adventurers dislike you?”

If the two guilds started antagonizing each other, then it’d mean that adventurers would have a hard time getting a lot of the items they needed to go out and do their jobs, which, in turn, would likely led to adventurers disliking Eugene as well.

“I don’t think so. If anything, I think most of the adventurers are glad that the Doctor joined our ranks.”

“Why?”

“The doctor’s been teaching alchemy to some of the guild’s other members, and as a result, we’ve gained the ability to produce our own proprietary goods. In other words, we managed to eliminate the Alchemist’s Guild’s monopoly, and thus, their ability to control the market. Many items are actually even cheaper than they used to be, so it’s actually much easier for adventurers to get their hands on them.”

“Though that’s likely why so many alchemists are feeling bitter about the matter.”

So that’s how it is. I admit that I do pity Eugene a bit, but I can’t say his situation isn’t one that’s to our benefit. I was a bit worried that information about us would end up getting leaked if we took our questions to the Alchemist’s Guild. Moreover, the items we’d obtained had come from pirates, so there was also always the possibility that they’d ask us to return them. Having someone that’s a part of the Adventurer’s Guild do everything for us instead reduced both those risks by a lot. It looked like the guild really trusted the doctor, so things were looking up. All knowledge of the items in our possession would probably stay a secret.

We were asked to sit shortly after our guide had left the room and returned to her regular duties.

“How would you feel about a cup of tea before we get down to business?”

“Nn. Thanks.”

The cup Fran was given was filled with a darkened liquid that bore a slight resemblance to Oolong Tea.

“Nn.”

Fran immediately picked up the cup and give it a small sip. It looked like she wanted to keep drinking, but she was black cat beastman and thus, her tongue was rather sensitive to heat. ^[1]

“Oh? You’re not going to react at all?”

Eugene looked at Fran with a bit of an inquisitive expression. Wait, why? Was the tea

supposed to be poisoned or something? Nah, no way. Appraisal said it was just a regular cup of Oobow tea. Fran's status was perfectly normal too, so...

"Ah, right, I should probably explain. I really like the flavour of that tea, but it seems that most that've tried it found it too bitter, and some would even spit it back out immediately. Lately, I've started to find people's reactions to its taste to be something of interest. It seems however, like you don't dislike the taste."

"Nn. Tasty."

"I'm glad to hear it! Not many people can find themselves able to appreciate its flavour."

Oh, I get it. It's kind of like Senburi tea. People who like it love it, but the people who don't can't stand it at all.

"Bitter but tasty."

"Yeah, exactly! I'm glad you feel the same way. Would you like to take some tea leaves with you?"

"Please."

Eugene happily handed Fran a bag of tea leaves. He really did seem happy that he managed to find someone else who liked the tea's flavour.

"Now then, why don't we get down to business?"

"Want you to look at some items."

"Oh?"

"But don't want you to tell anyone else. If possible."

"That's fine. Lots of people have requested the same before, and I'm proud to say that I've managed to keep everything confidential."

[The doctor isn't lying. It looks like you can trust him.]

“Nn. Examine these.”

We already knew enough about the the Highest Grade Life Potions, the Panaceas, and the High Grade Mana Potions, so we didn't bother having him tell us about them. We intended to have him look through the rest, so we started with the less harmful looking ones at the forefront.

“Is that a High Grade Potion of Repair? That's quite the item you've got there.”

“Want to know its value.”

“Hmmm... If you were to purchase that at a store, it'd normally run you about twenty thousand Golde.”

Well, that's more than I was expecting.

“It's a bit on the pricey side, but it's effect is well worth it. It can allow you to repair your equipment even if you're out in the middle of adventuring. It even has the ability to repair magic weapons, which are typically known to be quite difficult to fix.”

Yeah, it definitely was convenient. Just using a potion to repair a magic sword was definitely way easier than the arduous process of bringing it to a blacksmith, only to find out that they lacked the required materials, and that'd have to gather them yourself.

“Then. This?”

“Oh? That's another rare one. It's called a Potion of Rising Skill, and it's worth approximately three hundred thousand Golde, however, its price can be inflated up to another ten times as a result of the fact that nobles have an extremely high demand for them. “

Ten times? Wait, so this thing can be worth up to three million Golde? What the hell, that's ridiculously expensive! Though, I guess I can kind of see why. Nobles probably buy these for their kids so they can boost up their skill levels without having to risk any sort of danger. I'd actually find it weird for this not to be in high demand.

“Next. Have three of these.”

“Wow... one amazing thing after another is it? This one trumps both your previous items by far.”

It's even more amazing than a portion that can easily net us over three hundred thousand Golde?

“Do you know what Alchemy potions do?”

“Nope.”

“They're potions used in alchemy, as suggested by their names. You can mix them in whilst producing an alchemic product in order to elevate the resulting quality and effects. The highest grade ones that you have are so rare that not even I've seen them in quite the amount of time. Mixing one into a bunch of ingredients that would normally result in a lesser potion would make so you'd get a high grade potion instead.”

“Then. Means expensive?”

“Very. They cost about a million Golde per piece.”

“Really?”

Holy crap! They're both incredibly expensive and effective. If they can turn lesser potions into high grade ones, then what would happen if you mixed them into highest grade potions? Would you end up creating something that could resurrect the dead?

It looked like we made a total of at least three and half million so far. I really wanted to give myself a high five for choosing that box right about now.

[F-Fran, we should show him the rest of what we got.]

“Nn. How about this?”

The next potion Fran brought out was the one I was most curious about, the Anti-Side Effect Potion.

“How interesting. They should be worth about three hundred thousand Golde a piece, but it's worth nothing that they're so rare that I've never actually seen one in person

before.”

“Want to know detailed effects. Especially when used on inorganics. And magic beasts.”

“It should work on magic beasts without any issues whatsoever. I can’t say I’m sure when it comes to inorganics... but it should work.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It’s like the Potion of Repair you showed me earlier. They’re both magically enhanced potions, so they should work similarly.”

“Understood. Example. This sword has a powerful special ability. But cannot use for several days after using it. Will using this potion make that time shorter?”

“Hmmm... To be honest, I can’t say for sure whether it’d work like that or not. But it could, theoretically...”

It’s a bit of shame that we can’t actually confirm the potion’s efficacy, but whatever. At least we learned that it *could* work. We had three, so we could always just use one of them to run a test. Though, said test would result in a net loss of three hundred thousand Golde.

“I have to admit, I’ve been finding this whole thing quite fun. Did you happen to have anything else?”

“This.”

“Hmmm... It looks like a Potion of Attribute Reversal, and there’s quite the amount of it as well.”

“Nn? Only have one.”

“You don’t normally use more than just a few drops at a time.”

Apparently, the Potion of Attribute Reversal had the ability to do exactly what its name said. It could reverse magical elements, purify poison, and even turn a curse into a blessing. It looked like it’d be fun to play around with.

“You’ve got quite a lot of it. If you used it all at once, you’d probably be able to eliminate a really powerful curse, or maybe even purify a whole pond’s worth of poison. It should be worth about one hundred thousand Golde. It’s an amazing potion, but its price isn’t too high because of its limited applications.”

Oh, so it’s cheap because there isn’t any demand for it. Well, technically it’s not really cheap at all, but like, you know, relatively speaking.;

“Hmmm... Would you like to see its effects? We could use a drop of it to perform a bit of an experiment, if you’d like.”

(Master?)

[I don’t really mind if it’s just a drop or two. I’m pretty curious about the experiment he’s got in mind.]

“Nn. Accepted.”

“Alright. Give me just a second.”

Eugene grabbed a glass bottle that seemed to look something like a beaker. It was probably one of the tools he used for alchemy.

“The bottle is only filled with water for now, but I’m going to put a bit of poison inside of it.”

The doctor used a skill and caused a bit of black liquid dripped to drop from his open palm into the beaker.

“Alright, now, you can use this thing right here to verify that the bottle contains poison.”

“Thing?”

“These glasses give you the ability to use appraisal, though its effects are only about the same as that of the skill at level 1.”

Glasses that let you appraise things? That’s pretty neat. I decided to go along with the

whole thing and join it with my appraisal as well. Checking the water informed me that it was poisoned, just as the doctor had described it to be.

“Verified.”

“And now, all we have to do is just drip a single drop of the Potion of Attribute Reversal into the bottle.”

“Amazing. Deadly poison water transformed. Water of rejuvenation.”

“Great, ain’t it? The poison’s disappeared altogether. You could probably even use this water to make tea.”

“Nn? Can make tea with it?”

“Yeah, and it even makes it more delicious.”

“Delicious?”

“Oh? I guess you must’ve not been aware that the human tongue has the ability to detect magic. That’s why we enjoy eating magic beasts. The same applies to magically enhanced water. Magically enhanced water can totally change the flavour of a cup of tea or a bowl of soup. Would you like to give it a try?”

“Nn.”

“Alright, hold on for a little bit.”

The doctor took about three minutes to prepare Fran another cup of Oobow tea. It didn’t look any different, but apparently looks weren’t everything.

“Tasty!”

“Right?”

Apparently the taste had changed so much that it’d even surprised Fran.

[Is it really that good?]

(Totally different taste. Way yummier.)

The tea now even had the ability to restore one's stamina and cure minor status conditions. It looked to me like this was something that'd sell pretty well, but the doctor said that it wasn't a very profitable business because the potion was far too difficult to make in large quantities.

"Possible to make food taste better by pouring in magical energy?"

Ohhh, that's a good idea.

"Nah. You'd have to use the type of magic most compatible with your ingredients, else the food would actually end up tasting worse. You could pull it off for a single ingredient like water, but, you can't just pour magical energy into a completed dish to make it taste better."

"Too bad."

"You also don't want there to be too much magic in the food either."

"Really?"

"If you eat too much stuff with a lot of magical energy in it, you're going to end up craving nothing but the taste of magic. All your other tastes will begin to dull."

Right, makes sense. I do remember there being people that always thought whatever they were eating wasn't spicy enough. Likewise, there were also people that'd put sugar on literally everything. Magic probably messed up your sense of taste just the same way.

"Why don't we take demons as an example? They're born with a lot of magical energy, and hence, they're fairly sensitive to it. They tend like foods that contain it and since they eat a lot of it throughout their lives, they end up developing a completely different sense of taste than everyone on the more human side of the spectrum. In fact, they don't even care for any other flavours. All that matters to them is that the food they eat has magic in it. I've actually had a demon, an acquaintance of mine, cook for me in the past, and all I can say is that their food tastes like it literally comes from hell."

Hmm, so that's how that works. I better be careful not to mess up Fran's sense of taste.

I should probably try to think up a dish that uses a sort of subtle taste as opposed to relying on magical energy.

“Anyways, back on topic. I have to say, I can’t actually use my appraisal skill on the Potion of Attribute Reversal.”

Oh yeah, right, that was a thing. Can’t help but wonder why, now that he’s brought it up and all that.

“It’s because the ingredients are a bit special. One of the chemicals used to create the potion contains appraisal blocking properties. As a result, the final product is also a bit difficult to appraise. Not even I can see anything more than just the item’s name. People with low leveled appraisal skills probably wouldn’t be able to see anything at all, and hence, most people end up labeling bottles like this one just so they don’t get lost. It makes me really wonder where you actually picked it up.”

The last part was nothing more than just a mumble, but regardless, it seemed like he was quite curious as to where we got all these portions.

“Next. This one.”

“A root of arcane soul, and an interesting one at that.”

“Looks empty. Used for what?”

“Don’t mind the invisibility, they’re supposed to be like that. Just think of it as a bottle containing a bunch of magical energy. You can use it to make artificial magic stones.”

“Artificial magic stones?”

“You normally use them when you’re making yourself a familiar. This thing basically ends up becoming the most important part of said familiar’s magic stone. You can use it to adjust the familiar’s skills and properties. I can’t really get anything out of appraising it, so I’d say that it’s most likely potent enough to create a fairly powerful final product.”

“Price?”

“Hmm... Somewhere in the range of fifty thousand to a million.”

That's a pretty huge price range. Though, I guess it's fair given how little is known about it. Its value can probably change depending on who you're trying to sell it to too. Well, that one's going to sit in storage for a while.

"Last one."

The last item we pulled out was the one most likely to cause issues.

"That's... quite the item you've got there."

"Bad to have?"

"Yeah. It's really dangerous, especially if you're carrying it around. Make sure you don't drop it. Okay?"

Eugene's expression had stayed relatively calm throughout the process, but seeing our last item had caused his face to pale. Apparently the Poison Mixture of the Highest Grade was actually something really hazardous.

"That's another one I haven't seen in a long time."

"Approximate value?"

"Well, you see, that isn't something you can just put a price on. In fact, selling it might end up getting you in trouble with the law unless you follow a certain set of procedures. That's just how dangerous it is."

"That bad?"

"Well... Why don't I put it this way? You could probably get rid of it by giving it to some sort of military or criminal organisation for about a million Golde. I myself had used it twenty years ago in order to subjugate a dragon classified as a B ranked threat."

"How effective?"

"A single drop of the stuff is potent enough to kill a hundred grown men, so by that metric, you have enough to wipe out about two thousand people. If you were to use all of it at once, you could probably kill a D ranked magic beast with ease. Even if it didn't

die, it'd probably end up crippled and utterly dysfunctional."

Wow, that's uh, pretty bad. I'm not so sure we should actually hold onto it, especially given that Eugene was glaring at it with a rather complicated look on his face.

"I'm not going to force you to agree to this, but, I'd like to take it off your hands. To be completely honest, that poison right there is so deadly that I really don't want anyone else knowing about it at all. I can pay you up to two hundred thousand Golde."

"Accepted."

The bottle sitting in front of us was actually one of many. We'd originally only had a single large bottle of the stuff, but I had Urushi combine his poison magic with my telekinesis in order to divide up the larger bottle's contents into a bunch of smaller portions. I'd actually even gone and used space/time magic in order to timestop the poison and make the whole process more safe, but, we ultimately ended up rushing it anyway because I could only hold the timestop for a total of five seconds at once. ^[2]

To be honest, we'd actually only split it up into several smaller bottles because we'd suspected that it'd be confiscated.

"That said, I didn't actually know that there were any alchemists out there capable of creating this... Where exactly did you happen to get it?"

It'd probably be better for us to tell him than not.

[Fran, show him the box.]

"Nn. This."

"Isn't that one of the Alchemist's Guild's transport boxes?"

"Found it at pirate's base. All potions came from inside."

"That can't be... I don't think the Alchemist's Guild had anyone capable of... Wait..."

He began to start brooding in response the reveal.

"Something wrong?"

“Sorry, it’s just that something seems off.”

“Off?”

“Well, you’re both the person who discovered the box, as well as an adventurer, so I guess there won’t be any harm in telling you. Normally, losing a box like that would cause quite the uproar given the value of the potions and dangerous chemicals within it. Hence, its owner should have contacted the Adventurer’s Guild and issued an order for its immediate retrieval.”

“But no request?”

“Not any that I’ve heard of, at the very least. Keeping silent about the loss of a Poison Mixture of the Highest Grade could even lead to being punished with treason. We also don’t know who these potions were being shipped to, and why. In other words, we’re going to need to get in touch with the Alchemist’s Guild in order to figure out what’s going on.”

That’s fine, but I really don’t want Fran’s name getting out there, especially not for something like this.

“Don’t worry about it. I can swear that I will not disclose your identity.”

Doesn’t look like he’s lying. Well, I guess it can’t be helped then. He’d probably suspect us if we went against him, so let’s just say he owes us and be done with it.

“Okay.”

“Thank you. Make sure you stop by again. I’ll be around most of the time, and I’ll make sure to serve you another cup of tea if you do drop by.”

“Nn.”

Well, I was interested in alchemy anyway, so yeah, why not?

TL Changelog (Reworded a bunch of stuff to make it sound better.)

Inherent Skills -> Innate Skills

Full Heal -> Panacea

Magical Medicine -> Magically Enhanced Potion

Drug of Reversed Attributes -> Potion of Attribute Reversal

CHAPTER 105

PORK CURRY BEST CURRY!

We headed back over to the inn after finishing up our business at the Adventurer's Guild.

I wanted to straight up just go out, find a kitchen, and buy everything we needed, but we couldn't actually get to that right away. There was still something else we needed to do first.

[We're going to need to decide what we're going to be selling.]

"Curry."

"Woof!"

[Well, yeah, but we still have to think about our ingredients and figure out how spicy we're going to make it. We also have to determine how we're going to serve our customers and get all that ready too.]

Barbra was a pretty big town, and there were lots of stalls and stuff for food all over the place, so it probably wouldn't be all that hard for us to get in touch with someone willing to sign a wholesale contract for all our miscellaneous needs. Both paper plates and wooden spoons could be mass produced through the use of alchemy, and apparently the Chef's Guild had a few contacts of their own, so we could actually just get everything done through them if we wanted. They'd probably give us a pretty good price point too.

We already had all the spices we needed on hand thanks to our pirate "friends," so that was something we could cross off right away.

All in all, we had forty different types of spices at our disposal, so I set each out on a plate and lined them all up in front of me. We had such a large variety that I actually had to liberty choose to make it as mild or spicy as I wanted.

"Mild is better choice. Spicy is tasty but hard to eat."

[Hm, you did always like the milder ones more. Besides, a milder curry is a lot less risky than something on the spicier side seeing as how children will probably end up being a pretty big portion of our sales.]

“Nn.”

“Whimper.”

[Oh yeah, you did like the spicier ones, didn’t you Urushi?]

“Woof woof!”

[Hmmm, well, I do think that a fair portion of our older customers will probably prefer a bit more spice in it as well.]

I mean, we could always just do both. Either way, we probably need to put a bit more thought into the ingredients first...

[What kind of curry do you think I should make? We could probably use beef-like meat, pork-like meat, lizard-like meat, fish-like meat or chicken-like meat. Bug-like meat, tiger-like meat, and wolf-like meat could probably work as well.]

The reason I stuck a “-like” after all the potential ingredient types was because we weren’t actually going to use regular farm animals. We were planning to use meat procured from magic beasts instead. For example, we’d be using Crash Boars instead of pigs if we went with pork, and Rock Bison instead of cows if we went with beef.

“Hmm... Pork.”

[Alright, that’s one thing we could do.]

“Woof!”

[You liked bird meat, right Urushi?]

“Woof woof!”

[Alright, pork and chicken are going to be our two main choices then.]

“Woof!”

People from the Kansai region seemed to like beef-based curries. I, however, was from the Kantou region, and thus, I myself was much more inclined towards pork. Fran liked pork as too, and she’d always ask for it to be used in curry. Hence, I ending up using most of the cow-like creatures for stuff like hamburgers and barbeques instead. ^[1]

If we wanted meat, we’d probably have to find ourselves a butcher. I remember seeing a decent number of them in the marketplace. Said marketplace was really big, so we didn’t actually get to check out all the shops yet, but I was pretty sure that at least a few specialized in butchering magic beasts.

[Did you want to put anything else in? We’re going to use potatoes, carrots and onions for sure. Curry wouldn’t really be curry without them. That said, we could probably try enhancing the flavour by adding a few secret ingredients too. You know, stuff like apples, or honey, or maybe even chocolate...]

Fran was the type that didn’t really like chunks in her curry. She very much preferred when the vegetables were cooked to the point where they kind of just ended up melting into the mixture, hence the choices listed.

“What about toppings?”

[Won’t those be a bit too hard to manage? We only have one stall’s worth of space]

“Breaded cutlets. Cheeseburgers. Kara-age. Hot spring eggs. Deep fried vegetables. All tasty.”

Yeah, that’s way too many. At most, we could have like one or two...

[Why don’t we go check out the market place? We can think about what toppings we’ll have after we finish getting all the materials we need. Let’s try focusing on procuring the best pork-like meat and vegetables we can get for now.]

“Nn.”

We browsed Barbra’s massive portside marketplace for about an hour. All sorts of goods were on display, and most could even be found in wholesale tier quantities, but

despite that, we weren't able to get our hands on what we needed.

[It doesn't look like any of the butchers really have all that much magic beast meat in stock.]

Pork-type magic beast meat was not only especially rare, but also extremely expensive. Maybe it'd be better for us to give up and just use regular pork instead.

I mean, we were already in a pretty good spot anyways. Curry wasn't exactly something that the people of this world would be able to get their hands on with ease, so we could probably pull a win with just the rarity factor.

On the bright side, we did manage to catch sight of all the vegetable-type stuff we needed. Apples, honey, chocolate, and coffee all looked like they were in pretty high abundance as well. I wouldn't have any problems giving the curry a bit of an extra kick, so in all honesty, we didn't need to use meat procured from magic beasts.

"Nom nom."

"Om bark nom bark"

[You guys sure seem to be enjoying yourselves.]

"Doing market research. Need to determine popular tastes."

"Woof woof."

[Well, that's fine, I guess.]

They were being relatively quiet, so it was pretty easy for me to listen in on people trying to make deals, which in turn helped me gather information on suppliers and market prices.

[Wait, did you just say market research? That's actually a pretty good idea. We should go check out the competition.]

"Check out competition?"

[Yeah, let's go find all the people who did well last year and try a bit of their cooking.]

Pretty much everyone that qualified last year was now super famous, so we might just be able to eat some of their dishes if we headed over to their workplaces.

“Nn. Got it.”

“Woof woof!”

Urushi was happily wagging his tail, but I felt like there was a pretty good chance that he wasn’t going to be allowed in any of the stores. I hope he doesn’t get too disappointed.

It was actually surprisingly easy for us to gather all the information we needed. Many of Barbra’s roadside stalls were run by old men that caved almost instantly at the sight of a beautiful young woman buying their goods on en masse. They pretty much divulged everything they knew without so much as a second thought.

“Here?”

[The sign says “The Dragon’s Table,” so yeah, should be the right place.]

After gathering a bit of information, we arrived at the conclusion that this was the closest place. Moveover, the owner was actually one of last year’s finalists.

I had expected the place to be super high class, but its exterior wasn’t nearly as fancy as I’d imagined. The prices on the menu sitting out front weren’t really high either, so I couldn’t help but suspect that we’d come to the wrong place.

“Store open?”

We pushed the door open and looked inside. The restaurant itself had a calm, relaxing atmosphere.

“Welcome. Table for one?”

“Nn. One person. One pet.”

“I’m sorry, but this restaurant doesn’t allow pets.”

“But Urushi...”

“Whimper whimper.”

[Well, rules are rules. You’re going to have to stay in Fran’s shadow for a bit.]

“Whimper...”

I’ll treat him to something nice later to make up for it.

“Then just one person.”

“D-Did your dog just sink into your shadow...?”

“Must be mistaken.”

“Huh? Really? W-Well, there’s no way a dog can just sink into a shadow, so you’re probably right. I must be getting tired.”

Sorry waitress lady... Seems like this is really hard on you.

“Recommendations?”

“Hmm... What about the Dragon Bone Soup? It’s one of our signatures, and if you look outside you’ll see it on the menu.”

“Dragon bone? Bones from dragons used in soup stock?”

“Yup, it’s really good.”

Dragon bone soup eh? I can’t even imagine how that’s supposed to taste.

“Then that. And this, this, this and this.”

“Our servings are a bit big. Are you sure you’d like to order all that?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, then I’ll just repeat your order so I can have you verify it. It’ll be one Dragon

Bone Soup, one Rockbird Steak, one Gold Sheep Skewer, one Yggd Potato Salad, and one Barbra Crab Pilaf, right?”

“Nn.”

It looked like a lot of food, but to Fran, it really wasn’t all that much at all.

The first dish to arrive, the Dragon Bone Soup, came after about ten minutes worth of waiting. The bowl didn’t actually contain any traces of the ingredients used to create the final product. The only thing it had inside of it was a golden, translucent, consomme-like soup.

I sneakily stored about half of the Dragon Bone Soup away for research purposes as soon as the waitress stopped paying attention.

(Can eat now?)

[Yeah, go ahead.]

“Eating then.”

Slurp slurp.

Fran raised the bowl and drank a mouthful of its contents.

[How is it?]

“...Yummy.”

Her face seemed a bit pained, and far from content. Was it actually really bad or something?

“Might be even better than Master’s consomme soup.”

[I see.]

It’s gotta be pretty amazing then. That’s probably the highest possible praise one could possibly get from Fran as far as food goes.

Much to my surprise, the soup was priced pretty cheaply. All of the store's other dishes that used magic beasts cost around 50 Golde a plate, but the soup only cost 20.

It looked like I'd been underestimating the competition far too much. I probably won't be able to win if I just half ass everything.

Sampling the soup with a doppelganger after we got back to the inn only convinced me of my prior observation all the more.

We later went back over to the market and checked out a few more of the stores related to last year's participants and came to the conclusion that all of them had pretty damned good food. My Doppelganger's senses were relatively fine tuned as a result of the superiorization process, so I had about the same sense of taste as the average human being. Hence, I was able to come to an understanding of exactly how skilled our competitors were.

[It looks like we might actually end up dead last if I don't try my best.]

Okay, yeah. Regular pork is definitely out of the question. I'm going to have to find myself some sort of magic beast meat. I've got to be careful in choosing the rest of my materials as well. Freshness and taste are important, but we can't go over budget else we won't profit enough. I'm going to use as many spices as necessary without holding back though.

I have to figure out exactly how we're going to sell everything too. I mean, how are you actually supposed to sell curry using a stall? People might think that they're not actually getting enough bang for their buck if all we give them is a plate with some rice and curry on it.

Alright, the only way for us to really do this will be to use every connection we've got.

[We should probably pay the Luciel Conglomerate a visit. They were supposed to be a pretty big company, so they might have the meat and vegetables we need in stock.]

"Nn. Got it."

Let's see, is there anything else we're missing? We've got the spices. The meat and vegetables hopefully won't be an issue, so all that's left would be... water. I want to use decently high quality water. I mean, the wells aren't here aren't bad or anything, it

seemed that well water wasn't the only type of water that could potentially be available to us.

We should probably ask the people at the conglomerate about that as well. We do have money, so we could probably make up for a decent amount of our lack of experience and skill by using high quality materials. I kinda ended up attacking this whole thing with a bit of a nouveau riche type approach, but hey, whatever it takes for victory is whatever I'll do.

[Let's make sure we get our hands on some good materials!]

"Yeah."

"Woof!"

CHAPTER 106

THE LUCIEL CONGLOMERATE

“Hey, welcome. Glad to see you chose to stop by.”

“Nn.”

“Woof!”

“Hahaha, welcome to you too Urushi.”

We were currently inside the Luciel Conglomerate’s HQ. The building was about the same size as the Adventurer’s Guild, only several times more extravagant. Putting it next to Fran made her look really out of place, but she boldly walked right in regardless. Man, she’s got guts.

The coin we got from the captain was seriously one hell of an item. Flashing it caused the people at the reception desk to show us over to a fancy-looking waiting room without so much as a question.

Rengil showed up in said room not long after we were taken to it. We’d only just parted that morning, but he happily greeted Fran with a smile and handshake regardless. He seemed genuinely excited to see us.

“So did you have any sort of business here, or were you just visiting?”

“Nn. Participating in this.”

“Oh, you’re participating in the King of Cooking? Did you already pass the first round?”

He figured out what she was talking about with nothing more than a single glance at the flyer she handed him. The contest was pretty famous, so it only made sense that the captain knew about it.

“Master passed.”

“You had a Master? I don’t think there was anyone like that aboard the ship, right?”

“Nn. Master is elusive. Like a phantom.”

“I see, so did the two of you meet up here then?”

We’d come up with a bit of an odd scenario. Fran’s story would be that I, her master, was the type of man that wandered the continent and appeared where and whenever he so pleased. It probably doesn’t really give them the best impression of me, but whatever, can’t be helped.

“Want to get ingredients for Master. For cooking contest.”

“Ah, gotcha, so that’s why you’re here. What kind of dish is he planning to make? The competition’s been pretty fierce every year, so it’s gotta be something really good.”

“Curry.”

“Curry? Never heard of anything called curry before.”

“Master’s own recipe. Here.”

Fran took a plate of curry out from her dimensional storage and placed it atop a table in front of Rengil.

The captain looked at the dish with a bit of a hesitant gaze. Well, I guess that was fair. It was brown, and didn’t really look all that appetizing if you didn’t know what it was. He probably couldn’t really even guess at how it tasted. But that all soon changed, his eyes opened wide the moment he caught a whiff of the dish’s scent. He seemed to come to the realization that it was flavoured with all sorts of spices, which further lead him to swallow a gulp of what must’ve been drool.

“Alright, down the hatch it goes.”

The first bite he took was still a rather cautious and careful one, but the dish’s contents almost vanished instantly immediately afterwards he finished it. His spoon continued to move until the plate we handed him was wiped clean. Seeing him enjoy its flavour like that left me feeling quite content.

“It’s delicious, fragrant, and even something completely original. I guarantee you that it’ll definitely fly right off the shelves. That’s one valuable recipe you’ve got right there!”

Rengil was so excited that he ended up raising his voice in a shout. Sweet, it looks like we’ve even got an experienced merchant’s approval.

“Is this what he was planning to sell at his stall?”

“Nn.”

“I see...”

“Something wrong?”

“Bark?”

“Well, the dish itself is really quite delicious, but it might not do all that well at a stall.”

“Why? Curry is tasty.”

“It’s not exactly what I’d call customer accessible.”

Most that’d qualified for the finals in the past had sold skewers or soup, stuff that was relatively easy for customers to grab immediately after making their orders. The goal was to profit, so you had to make sure you sold as much as possible in the given time frame.

Curry was unlike the examples listed in the sense that it wasn’t something that customers could just pick up and walk away with. We would have to serve each plate by placing a bunch of rice on it, pouring curry all over said rice, and then finally handing it over to the customer. To make matters worse, the whole plate format made it so that customers couldn’t actually buy our products en masse. At most, the average consumer could hold only a single plate in each hand.

What if we ignored the whole rice thing and made it kind of like curry soup? Hmm... nah, I doubt it’d be able to trump the Dragon Bone Soup.

Coming to the realisation that we needed a change of plans caused Fran to groan.

“Need easy way to sell curry in bulk...?”

“Yeah. You can’t rely on taste alone if you want to get through the second round.”

Okay yeah, this isn’t going to work if we stick to the whole curry with rice idea...

“Oh! Got good idea. Can just turn inside out.”

“Inside out?”

“Nn. Put curry inside rice. Like onigiri.”^[1]

“Woof!”

Onigiri was one of Fran’s favourite dishes. She pretty much loved to eat the rice balls regardless of what they were filled with, so she must’ve figured that it’d work pretty well with curry. Urushi seemed all gung ho about the idea as well; he immediately started to drool at Fran’s mention of the combined dish.

Curry flavoured onigiri, is it? I mean, it does sound like a good idea, but the curry would probably eventually start to leak out the bottom of its ricey container, so it wouldn’t really be convenient as far as customers were concerned. I could just pack the rice super tight to prevent any leakage, but that’d probably make it taste a lot worse.

(Can’t fry it like tempura?)

[Hmm, curry onigiri tempura?]

You know, that might actually end up working. Its name is totally not something you’d put on any sort of A-list, but the tastes might mesh together pretty decently. That said, I’d a better idea. Fran’s words had reminded me of a dish I’d coincidentally forgotten until just now.

[Hmm, that’s a pretty good idea.]

(Nn? Tempura onigiri?)

[No, no, not that.]

I knew of a dish that fulfilled all our needs. It was fairly cheap, easy to carry, and it could even be sold in bulk. It was especially delicious fresh out of the oven, but pretty much just as good even after cooling down.

[Let's go with curry bread.] ^[2]

(Curry bread!)

(Woof woof!)

Neither Fran nor Urushi had ever had it before, but its name contained the word curry, so both their eyes seemed to light up immediately in response.

If we went down the curry bread route, we'd be able to mass produce our products ahead of time. We could even make several different kinds, each with its own unique flavour.

Hearing me elaborate on the idea caused Fran's eyes to shine with even greater intensity.

"Will work. Curry bread."

"Woof!"

"Curry bread? What's that?"

"Put curry in dough and fry."

"I see, I see. That sounds like it could work. The dish's fragrance would help you draw in customers, and they could pretty much order as many as they wanted."

"Can have different flavours."

"Oh, that's a pretty strong pro too."

Alright! I finally know what to do! Curry bread ahoy!

That said, our plans were still riddled with problems.

“Need flour. Can get from here?”

“Hmm... Are you okay with the type normally used for bread?”

(Master?)

[Shouldn't be a problem.]

“No problem.”

“Alright.”

Apparently they had a tonne of flour in stock, so we could more or less get as much as we wanted.

“I'll put in an urgent order for the flour so we can get it ready as soon as possible.”

“Nn. Thanks.”

I'm still a bit worried about the rest of our stuff though

“Need lots of other ingredients too. Can also get from here?”

“That'll depend on exactly what it is you're looking for. I know for a fact that we've got some pretty solid stocks on the vegetable side at least.”

“Want carrots, potatoes, onions for vegetables. Some apple too.”

“Alright, we weren't going to be able to get you any magic vegetables or the like, but that, we can do, especially since all the items you asked for can be stored away from quite some time. Do keep in mind that none of them will be just recently harvested though.”

Oh well, I guess it can't be helped. I'm actually pretty happy already seeing as how we managed to actually secure ourselves a reliable supplier. That said, the rest of our ingredients would probably need a bit extra oomph to make up for it.

“Any magic beast meat in stock?”

“We might’ve been able to get you some with a bit more time, but...”

Can’t say I didn’t see that coming. Not even the butchers could get their hands on any decent quantities of the stuff. Damn it, what now? We finally managed to solidify our concept and all that, but we’re lacking the most important part we need to actualize it.

“Then water?”

“Water? What about it?”

“Nn. Magic infused water. With effects like healing.”

“That’s a bit too far of a stretch too. Water’s really tough to transport, so I can’t say we’ve a lot of it in stock.”

Argggghh, that’s another option crossed right off... Wait, no, we could probably actually just make the water we needed ourselves. I have a whole swamp full of poisoned water sitting around in the dimensional storage. I could probably just use the Potion of Attribute Reversal on it and well, voila, water get.

In other words, we just need to focus on getting our hands on some high quality meat. Hmm... Actually, I do have an idea that could potentially solve all our problems. You see, the thing is, we weren’t just everyday run of the mill chefs. We were adventurers. If we couldn’t buy something off the marketplace, then we could simply just go get it ourselves. There were still a few days till things got up and running, so we had more than enough time. All we needed was figure out where to find the prey we were after.

“Don’t worry about magically infused water then. Would rather move to next topic. Want to know where to find magic beasts.”

“Are you planning to go hunting for all the meat you need?”

“Nn.”

“I think I’ve actually got the perfect place in mind for that.”

Rengil told us a bit about a haunt to Barbra's south. Its name was the Cage of Crystal, and its rank was B. [3]

That was where Barbra got most of its magic beast meat. The haunt was inhabited by a lot of D ranked magic beasts, so it was actually apparently thought of as a pretty dangerous place. It wasn't really that far, so the captain figured that we shouldn't have any issues at all.

"I'd warn you to be extra careful, but I feel like you of all people will probably be just fine. You've got Urushi with you too, after all."

"Nn. Will be fine."

"Woof!"

"Make sure you sell any extra meat to us though, alright?"

Man, he's shrewd. That said, we do owe him. He didn't charge us any fees for the information he gave us, and he's even offering to pay as opposed as opposed to just asking for free stuff. He's a pretty good guy, and he really has done us a favour. Yeah, we're probably going to be seeing each other a lot more going forward.

And that was that. It was a bit late, so we decided to head back for the time being so we could gather information and make the water we needed and whatnot. Apparently, it'd normally take about two days to reach the haunt on horseback, so it'd probably make for a bit more than just a day trip, even for us. We were going to have to leave pretty early tomorrow morning.

[It'll probably be a bit tough to pull everything off within the time limit, but I'll be counting on you guys. Let's do this!]

"Nn. Will work hard for curry bread's sake."

"Woof woof!"

I swear they're driven by nothing but appetite... Oh well, whatever. Our next steps were to find out a bit more about the haunt, have dinner, and then think a bit more about exactly what we're going to do about the whole curry bread situation.

[1] Rice balls, typically filled with some sort of tasty, preserved food. They're a huuuuge trend in Japan and you can pretty find like ten different types at any given convenience store, country wide. You can even find stores that literally only sell onigiri and nothing else. It's kind of like the Japanese equivalent of sandwiches. It's especially popular in the Kantou area, and I remember there being like three different chain stores last time I went. Image below.



[2] Bit different from a sandwich. He thinks of this when Fran says tempura curry onigiri because the two are rather similar. One is a deep fried ball of rice with curry inside of it. The other is a deep fried hunk of dough with curry inside of it. Here's an image of curry bread.



[3] Haunts are different from dungeons, but it's more or less the same kind of thing given how broad the definition of dungeons in games has become. It's quite literally translated at the moment, and I don't really like it. Most of the MMOs I've played recently have only had instance dungeons and raids, nothing named in any which way in particular. Someone help me think of a better name. Really gamey terms are ideal.

CHAPTER 107

THE CAGE OF THE CRYSTAL TREE

The date was March 31st; the Lunar Banquet was less than a day away.

We left for the haunt at sunrise. Luckily, our journey over its entrance proceeded rather smoothly, we didn't encounter any sort of trouble during our travels. The city was going to swing into full on festival mode when night hit, so I wanted to finish up all our business and get back as soon as possible. A few basic calculations determined that we should be able to make it back before the festival began, as it only took us three hours to fly on over to the haunt.

"Gya gya gya!"

"Groooooorororororo!"

The haunt could only be described as a deep, dark forest, filled with immense, high standing trees. Its interior contained magic beasts of all shapes and sizes. We could feel their presence and hear the noises they made even from the forest's entrance.

[So this is the so called B ranked haunt, The Cage of Crystals Tree, huh?]

"Can sense many magic beasts."

"Ruff."

[Alright, I'm going to go over our plans one more time, just in case. We're going to try and gun for the center-ish area and hunt for edible magic beasts.]

"Nn. Hunting for meat."

"Woof woof."

Not all magic beasts were entirely edible, even if their bodies were filled to the brim with magical energy. We really didn't have all that much time on our hands, so it was in our best interest to only go after stuff we could actually use. Luckily, the research

we did at the Adventurer's Guild saved us quite a bit of trouble. There, we learned that most edible magic beasts were found somewhere around the forest's center area.

We immediately took the fastest route over. That is, Urushi carried Fran on his back whilst leaping through the air; it was far more efficient to navigate the overly dense woodland from above.

I wanted to try hunting a bit around the entrance as well, but we really didn't have the time for it, so I reluctantly refrained.

"Crystal Tree over there?"

[Yeah. Apparently it's well over three thousand years old.]

The Crystal Tree was one of many magical plants that had the ability to emit a sort of magical energy that drew in all sorts of herbivorous magic beasts. The plant's potency would scale with its size, and hence, it would draw in more and more powerful magic beasts as it grew. The tree's leaves were considered by magic beasts to be a sort of delicacy, and thus, they would fight for the right to the territory in its immediate vicinity. It was of such value to them that they'd even protect it from harm.

The herbivorous magic beasts that took residence around the tree would then function to draw in carnivorous ones. This process would ultimately continue to repeat itself over and over, and thus, all sorts of magic beasts ended up making its surroundings into their habitats. It could be said that this whole haunt was only here because The Crystal Tree had sprouted here, especially seeing as how The Crystal Tree located here was classified as both the world's oldest and largest magic tree.

Riding on Urushi's back as he traversed a path atop the sea of trees allowed us to observe The Crystal Tree in all its majesty.

It really did live up to its reputation. The tree's height surpassed three hundred meters, and its leaves shone with a brilliance that made them seem as if they really were made out of crystal.

And so, I burned it in my eyes.

A sight that would have outright been impossible in the world from which I came.

Creatures that resembled birds flew around the tree's branches. They looked but like fledglings in comparison to the plant's grand stature, but in reality, each had a wingspan of at least three meters. I didn't particularly wish to deal with them, they looked like a huge pain in the ass to fight.

[Be careful. We might start running into B leveled threats if we end up getting too close to the tree.]

"Got it."

[Anyway, we should be somewhere around the center area now. Let's find ourselves some magic beasts and descend.]

"Woof."

[It's finally time to go hunting.]

"Meat time."

"Woof woof!"

Twenty minutes passed.

[Oryaaaaaaa!]

"Squeeeeeallll!"

"Urushi. Over there."

"Growl!"

We found a group of five Swamp Pigs and took them down. In short, they could be described as pigs with shells that basically lived in the mud.

I wasn't really satisfied. We did actually end up hunting them down and all that, but honestly, it was far less a hit than it was a miss.

I mean, they were pig-type magic beasts, and they did taste pretty good. In fact, one could say that they really were quite delicious. However, they weren't good enough.

They carried with them an ever so slight stench of mud and filth even when cooked, and as a result, they actually didn't even taste as good as well fed, brand name, non-magic pork. The only adventurers that really bothered hunting them were newbies in need of some quick cash. That said, they were kind of amazing in their own way if you thought about it. They weren't well raised, nor selectively bred, yet, they still almost managed to taste as good as genuine branded pork.

Oh well, I guess we can treat them as insurance just in case we don't manage to find ourselves anything better.

[Alright Urushi, it'll be up to you to find some more magic beasts.]

"Woof!"

"Go deeper?"

[Yeah, that's not a bad suggestion. Let's try getting a bit closer to The Crystal Tree. We might not actually be in the center area yet.]

Swamp Pigs were supposed to be from the outermost layer anyways, so yeah.

An hour passed.

I could only conclude that hunting for a specific monster was none other than a huge pain in the ass. We'd only just managed to find a single wild boar. We kept running into all sorts of inedible magic beasts instead of actually coming across what we wanted.

"This magic beast. What captain was talking about?"

[Yup. It's a Golden Boar, and it looks exactly as he described it to be.]

General Information

Species: Gullinbursti
Magic Beast (Magic Boar)
Lv 22
HP: 716
MP: 226
STR: 309
VIT: 366
AGI: 203

INT: 85
MGC: 119
DEX: 81

Skills

Intimidate: Lv 4
Flame Resistance: Lv 3
Piercing Tusk Techniques: Lv 3
Piercing Tusk Arts: Lv 4
Cold Resistance: Lv 4
Charge: Lv 6
Thunder Resistance: Lv 3
Sensitive Nose
Enhanced Fur
Hardened Fur
Conviction

Description: A magic beast that resembles a wild boar. Its golden fur is extremely tough and can even has the ability to repel some degree of magic. Its tusks are powerful enough for it to crush large trees, and it has been observed taking down assailants twice its size. It knows not of the concept of retreat, and will continue to rush down its enemies with Charge regardless of the situation. Thus, it is nicknamed the Boar of Insanity. Threat level D. Its magic stone is located within its heart.

I'm pretty happy we finally managed to run into something we could turn into meat. Better yet was the fact that it was rather large. Its height was over five meters, and I'd say that its mass was probably at least twice Urushi's.

[We're after its meat, so try not to rough it up too much if you can help it.]

"I know."

[Urushi, you focus on distracting it and restricting its movements.]

"Growl growl!"

It'll probably end up bleeding a lot if we give it too many injuries, which in turn would lead to a reduction in its flavour. Hitting it in the wrong place will also end up reducing the amount of edible meat we can harvest from it.

The most ideal situation would be taking it out by destroying its magic stone in one

blow.

That said, I can't actually use my telekinetic catapult to get at it. I mean, I *could*. I would end up being able to take it out with ease, but I'd probably also end up pulverizing a good chunk of what would otherwise be edible flesh.

"Oinnnnkkkkk!"

[Tsk! Dodge it, Fran!]

The golden boar began charging at us as I contemplated our strategies.

It was much faster than I expected.

I tried slowing it down with Telekinesis, but it was charging with such force that it basically had no effect at all.

"Ugh!"

[You alright?]

"Some. how."

Fran managed to avoid a direct hit; the boar had only scraped her. But despite that, she ended up flying a whole ten meters. In other words, the boat was incredibly powerful. A single one of its strikes had managed to destroy several trees, each large enough to have been classified as sacred in Japan. ^[1]

Yeah no. We're going to have to put in a bit more than just a bit of effort.

Fran immediately used her Sky Jump to leap into the air and whilst brandishing me with a resolute look on her face.

[I'm going to use magic and dig up a pitfall. Urushi, try luring the boar over to it. We should be able to get ourselves a good window of a few seconds if it falls inside. Fran, make sure you take advantage of any openings so you can finish it off in one go.]

"Got it."

“Woof.”

“Oiiiiinkkkk!!”

I did exactly as described and created a bunch of large holes in the ground. Urushi also managed to perform pretty well. He stood in front of the boar and taunted it by moving around in an overly provocative manner. That is he shrank and then jumped up and down in order to annoy the boar as much as possible.

“Woof!”

And surely enough, he succeeded. The boar was irked by the now tiny wolf’s mannerisms and began charging at it in a straight line as if to crush it.

The boar’s charge contained all the force of an eighteen wheel truck, and again destroyed every tree that happened to be in its path. This time, however, its ability and lack of a will to retreat ended up doing it more harm than good.

“Oink?!”

[It fell for it! Fran, you turn!]

“Nn.”

Fran leapt through the air as she approached the pitfall the pig had fallen into whilst thrusting me towards its heart. I quickly followed up and thinned my shape in order to accommodate her actions.

“Haaah!”

“Squeeeaaaaalllll!”

Fran suddenly switched over to using a reverse grip and activated Pinpoint Stab, a level eight sword technique. She thrust me straight through the boar’s spine and pierced its magic stone whilst destroying as little of its flesh as possible, a textbook worthy killing blow.

I stored the golden boar away for the time being. We wanted to dismantle it immediately, but this wasn’t the place for that. Disassembling the boar’s body in the

middle of a haunt would likely attract more magic beasts. We'll probably have to just borrow the Adventurer's Guild's facilities later.

Either way, we'd managed to get all the pork substitute we needed. The boar literally had an entire tonne of useable meat on it, so we were well within the safe zone.

[Alright, that's one down, just a few more to go!]

"Nn."

"Woof!"

We hunted for another two or so hours and found ourselves a pair of cow-like magic beasts and five chicken-like ones. Their species names were Apis and Gullinkambi respectively. The Gullinkambis we happened across were actually guarding a nest, so we managed to pick up eight of their eggs as a bit of an extra bonus. I really had to say, we scored pretty big despite only going out on a relatively short hunt.

The magic beasts we happened across had actually all been decently strong. I mean, they were weaker than the kind of stuff you'd see in a dungeon, but they popped up way more often. Luckily, we didn't have to stay overnight as a result of the super high encounter rates, so we quickly began to head back in Barbra's direction the moment we achieved our objectives.

That said, I couldn't help but feel as if something was a bit off, it still seemed that the forest itself had been thrown into a state of restlessness. At first, I'd thought that the unnatural sensation stemmed from the fact that I was new to the place and didn't know much about it, Urushi and Fran felt the same as well, which was weird. None of us were able to really calm down.

It didn't take long for us to come to understand the reason behind the odd sensation we felt.

A thundering roar suddenly exploded from within the forest and assaulted our eardrums.

"Nn?"

[Woah! What's with this sudden influx of magical energy?]

“Growl...”

The loud roaring was accompanied by an immense wave of magical energy.

“Master. Over there.”

[Yeah, I see it.]

I noticed a massive bird-like thing flying around The Crystal Tree. It was a bit too far for me to appraise, but I immediately recognized it, partially because of the way it would shoot off waves of light from time to time.

[Looks like a Thunderbird and two Storm Eagles.]

Thunderbirds were B level threats, and Storm Eagles D level threats. The Adventurer’s Guild had informed us that the former was one of the area’s most dangerous magic beasts, and that we should be cautious of it in any given situation.

The Thunderbird’s rank was the same as the demon we defeated back when we were still in Alessa, but I honestly couldn’t say for sure if we could actually beat it in a fight. Unlike the demon, it wasn’t being held back in any which way. Moreover, it even had a pair of subordinates with it. We wouldn’t be able to get out unscathed even if we did win.

That said, the sudden intense magical influx we felt wasn’t something that originated from the Thunderbird.

“Person there. About to fight?”

I could vaguely make out the shape of person floating around the Thunderbird. Said person had so much magical energy that we could feel it from where we were now.

It didn’t look like he had any companions; he was fighting alone. I almost wanted to call him out for being reckless, but for some odd reason, I couldn’t help but feel as if he’d win. It seemed that he was why we had felt so unsettled; crisis detection and presence detection had been picking up his trail.

“Started moving.”

“Woof.”

The Thunderbird had started to shoot lighting from its beak, but, the person dodged the sky-illuminating electric strikes with ease.

It seemed that the Thunderbird had only been scoping his abilities out at first, as it immediately charged at him with a motion several times faster than what it'd been displaying thus far. It was easy for us to tell what it was doing since we were observing from a relatively safe distance, but the person in battle likely didn't have nearly as good a grasp on its actions due to the chaotic nature of combat. That said, the person was still able to dodge every attack aimed at him with ease. What terrifying reflexes.

The three birds flew back into formation whilst backing off, as if to regroup.

Only an ever so slight opening had been created by the action, but the person had managed to take advantage of it regardless. And thus, he began to counterattack.

And through said counter, he ended the battle in a single blow.

“Swords. Lots.”

[Hmm... is that magic? No, it looks more like a skill...]

An incredible number of swords instantly appeared around the person as he raised an arm. I couldn't tell if he summoned them or created them. He might've done something else altogether. Either way, I had no idea what he did. What I did know, however, was that every single one of the swords he summoned was at least as powerful as the average magic sword. Every single one was brimming with mana.

Every single one of his blades immediately accelerated towards the birds at high speed. They didn't move nearly as quickly as I did with my telekinetic catapult, but they more than made up for it with numbers; there were about a hundred in total. Seeing him in action reminded me of a certain gold-covered Heroic Spirit and the gate that lead to his treasury.

The magic beasts were overwhelmed; they were trapped by a cage of sword and assaulted by a bombardment of blades until they plummeted from the sky.

“Amazing.”

[Yeah, but I’d prefer not to get involved with him if possible.]

We didn’t really know anything of the person’s nature. There was always the chance that coming into contact with him would to trouble and nothing else.

The person in question was currently making their way over to the magic beasts that they defeated. It was a pretty good time to leave, so we once again began heading back in Barbra’s direction.

CHAPTER 108

EVIL KOBOLD

“Master, over there. Lots of people.”

[It looks like they’re heading towards Barbra.]

“But... Bit off somehow.”

We spotted a few carriages along the road on our way back to the city.

That in itself was totally normal. Today was the day of the Lunar Banquet, and we were only about an hour away from the city. I wouldn’t be surprised in any which way if the carriages contained villagers looking to have a good time in town.

We were still pretty far away from the aforementioned carriages, so we couldn’t actually see it in all that much detail. We could, however, still tell that something didn’t seem quite right. I could’ve sworn that I heard a scream or two.

[Hmmm... I think they might be getting attacked by magic beasts.]

Drawing a bit closer led me to realize that my prior guess had hit the mark spot on. The carriages were being chased and attacked by kobolds.

[Urushi, fly over there as quickly as you can!]

“Woof!”

Dashing through the air allowed us to get a much better view of what was going on. That is, four adventurers were currently fighting off the kobold onslaught with all they had.

“Don’t give up Dregg!”

“Keep it up! The villagers will be screwed if we mess up here!”

“Don’t let these damn things past even if it costs us our lives!”

“I know! I know already! There’s no way in hell I’ll let em pass me till the carriage is far away enough!”

“That’s the way!”

The adventurers had leapt off the carriages in order to better stall their assailants by facing them head on. All four of them were clearly risking their lives in hopes of letting the five carriages they accompanied escape. None of the four seemed like they intended to back off or run away despite the fact that a few of them had already suffered several heavy injuries.

Damn, they be manly as hell.

“Will help.”

[Go ahead. The enemy’s leader should be... that one over there.]

General Information

Species: Evil Kobold
Demonic Beast (Evil Being)
Lv 20
HP: 139
MP: 72
STR: 66
VIT: 71
AGI: 78
INT: 28
MGC: 41
DEX: 54

Skills

Intimidation: Lv 4
Commander: Lv 3
Claw Techniques: Lv 3
Claw Arts: Lv 3
Leap: Lv 4
Vigour Manipulation

Innate Skills

Art of Evil: Lv 3

Titles

Bound to the Evil God

Description: No known description.

Its title and innate skill were both a bit weird, as they seemed to point to the fact that the kobold was one of the Evil God's subordinates. Rather, that should've been a given seeing as how the kobold is classified as an evil being.

Was there supposed to be anything special about him though? Did he have those skills and titles because he had more of the Evil God's divine protection than the average member of his species? I mean, relatively speaking, his stats were pretty high. He was quite a bit stronger than the Goblin King I defeated in the past.

Would I end up getting that Art of Evil skill if I absorbed the kobold's magic stone, and would absorbing it automatically bind me to one of the Evil God in some way? Hmm... I'm not so sure trying it is what I'd call a good idea...

[Let's try to avoid having me absorb the boss kobold's magic stone. Apparently it's bound to the Evil God, so I don't think taking its abilities is that great an idea.]

"Nn. Got it."

[Urushi, we'll be leaving any leftover weaklings to you.]

"Woof."

Fran leapt off Urushi's back and used the force of her fall to split one of the kobolds in half. The kobolds were frozen in shock, but Fran didn't care. She began mowing weakling after weakling down with ease without so much as giving them a chance to recover from the impact of her sudden descent. Urushi did the same and proceeded to tear through enemy lines.

The pair's advent hadn't just left the kobolds speechless. It'd done the same to the adventurers and caused them to freeze in place.

It went without saying that the kobolds posed us no threat, but Fran refused to show

them any mercy regardless. She unhesitantly chose to cast Inferno Burst, the most powerful spell in our arsenal.

“Roooahhhrrghh!”

I was on guard because I was worried about the effects of the Evil God’s divine protection, but it turned out that my anxiety had been misplaced. In the end, the Evil Kobold was still just a kobold; Inferno Burst had roasted it and turned into nothing but a smoldering carcass in a matter of moments. We did manage to get ahold of its magic stone, but again, I didn’t feel like absorbing it, so I just chucked in storage instead.

The remaining kobolds immediately scattered upon losing their commander. The species as a whole was innately rather timid, but it seemed that having a strong leader had led them to act in a bit more of an ambitious manner. Losing said leader caused them to immediately regain their usual cowardice and flee. Oh well, whatever. They were weak and all, but honestly, chasing them down and killing them was a tedious waste of time, so we refrained.

All four adventurers had remained frozen for the entirety of the battle’s two minute duration. It seemed as if they had yet to finish processing the events that had just transpired. They were unable to immediately grasp that a child and wolf had descended from the sky, beat the enemies that they’d been struggling with, and even sent them running with their tails between their legs.

“Area Heal”

It wasn’t until after Fran started treated their wounds that they finally managed to provide some sort of response.

“Wa, wahh?”

“W-We’re being healed?”

“T-thanks, you really saved us there.”

“What the hell just happened?”

Apparently the four of them were all members of a party by the name of Cedrus’

Winds. Their moniker originated from the fact that their base of operations was located in Cedrus Village, a small, nearby settlement.

They told this whole long ass emotional tale about how hard they worked and the extent to which they endeavored in order to become true adventurers before finally settling down in Cedrus. Honestly though, I wasn't even the slightest bit interested, so the whole thing went in one ear and out the other.

What I did get from their story was that they were so thankful to the villagers that they were willing to risk their lives to protect them regardless of what kind injuries they suffered in the process. I didn't care for their flashbacks at all, but I honestly appreciated their actions for how manly they were.

All four of the adventurers took turns thanking Fran and shaking her hand. They offered to give her every single last one of the kobold's corpses despite the fact kobolds would've been worth quite a bit to them given their rank. I had to say, they were pretty good people even if it looked kind of weird for them to surround Fran while thanking her profusely the way they did. I mean, free stuff was free stuff, and I liked free stuff, but we ultimately ended up refusing their offer in the interest of time. We didn't really need kobolds for anything, and they weren't worth much to us, so yeah.

The five carriages that'd escaped a bit earlier quickly returned after noticing that kobolds had scattered. The villagers stepped out from within and all bowed their heads in turn to offer their thanks to the four adventurers that'd almost died saving them. The two groups really did seem to have a pretty good relationship with one another.

We asked the village chief a few quick things, and verified our expectations. We'd been right, they villagers within the carriages were currently on their way over to Barbra so that they could join in on the Lunar Banquet's festivities.

"It's pretty rare for Kobolds to be out here. The road is well travelled, so they normally stay far away, but most people have holed themselves in the city today because of the banquet."

Anyone and everyone's more or less taken today off because of the Lunar Banquet. The city was having trouble getting its usual patrols done; the lack of guards had left them understaffed.

We decided to give them a hand and stick with them until they reached the city. It was only an hour away, and I'd probably feel a bit guilty and overly conscious of my decisions if they ended up getting completely wiped out after we went through the trouble of helping them out once already.

The carriages only actually had six seats, so having two extra bodies made things a bit tight, especially with Urushi taking up the entire back seat. The villagers didn't seem to mind at all though, given that they'd already seen Fran's might. Besides, most of the people on the carriage we were in were children, so it wasn't as bad as it otherwise could've been.

One of the villagers, a woman late in her prime, handed Fran a few dried potatoes. ^[1]

"Nom nom."

"I like the way you eat! Here, try this too."

"Om nom nom."

"What a cute face you're making. Give this one a taste as well."

"Om nom"

"You look so adorable! You're just like a squirrel! Here, have another."

"Nom om nom."

The older ladies we were sitting with praised Fran in a bit of a shrill voice as they watched her stuff her cheeks.

Yup, they've got good eyes. Fran's super cute.

Riding Urushi would've made this whole trip a mere ten or so minutes, but Fran looked like she was enjoying herself. That, combined with the fact that they ended up telling us about all sorts of interesting, festival-related stuff, made riding the carriage well worth it.

The villagers were planning on staying in Barbra for a total of three days. Apparently, heading towards the city around this time of year was fairly common practice for

anyone that lived in a village in Barbra's immediate vicinity.

One of the main reasons that they had such a practice was because they wished to sample the cooking contest's products. Unfortunately, they as villagers weren't exactly what you'd call rich. They didn't have much money or time, so they could only afford to visit a maximum of four different stalls.

Apparently, traders and messengers had already informed all of the thirty or so villages nearby of the first round's results despite the fact they'd only just been announced yesterday. The villagers themselves had also already figured out which of the four they wished to visit; they'd sorted it all out ahead time in the interest of efficiency. The swiftness and excitement contained within their actions really served to testify the event's grand scale.

"It seems that Dordoros, last year's winner, isn't going to be participating this time around."

"That's because he got hired by the Kingdom of Norland. He's now working as their royal chef."

"Either way, we're definitely going to go to The Dragon's Table. They managed to win second last year, so they've gotta be good."

"Yeah, but don't be forgetting about Jeff's Meaty Steakhouse."

"We're obviously going to The Seafood Skewery too. You can't get stuff like that back in the village no matter where you look."

"And of course, it goes without saying that we'll be visiting Barbra's Orphanage too, right?"

"Barbra's Orphanage?"

Fran raised a question in response to the final item they listed. It didn't really seem to make sense or fit in with the rest.

"Yup. The orphanage's chef, Io, is really well known around here. They don't really use any fancy ingredients, but their dishes are still really delicious. They tend to leave you feeling really relaxed."

“We want to show the orphanage that we’re supporting their actions, so we visit their stall every year.”

“You really have to hand it to the chef. I don’t quite know how they manage to make their dishes taste so good!”

“Right? I think the orphanage managed to come in fourth last year too.”

And so they went on and on and on.

I was pretty content with learning about the contest’s more famous participants, but, I couldn’t help but feel vexed that they’d already decided where they were going ahead of time. They weren’t the only ones either, apparently their mentality was pretty normal. In other words, newcomers to the competition like us were at a pretty big disadvantage.

That said, it wasn’t like we were really in that bad of a spot. Curry bread was an amazing product. It could be stored for a couple days on end without any issues, and it didn’t even need to be reheated seeing as how it was still good even when cold. We should be able to appeal to people looking for a snack or two between meals.

“Also participating in contest.”

“You are? Really?”

“Nn. Master entered. Helping out.”

“Are you working at that place called “The Black Tail?” I think I remember the chef’s name being Master...”

The Black Tail was the name I randomly came up with on the spot when they gave us our registration forms. It seemed to fit, as it reflected a property shared by both Fran and Urushi.

“Yup.”

“Nice. What kind of stuff are you guys selling?”

“Curry bread.”

“Never heard of it.”

“Master’s own recipe. Really tasty, even when cold. Lots of spices. Ten Golde each. Can be carried around easily. Good for snacks.”

The older ladies hopped right on Fran’s advertisements and immediately took her words to heart.

“Can they last a few days without going bad?”

“Yup. Works well for gifts.”

“Oh great! That means we’d able to buy a bunch and take them back for everyone in the village.”

“That sounds like a great idea. We’ll make sure we stop by your stall too then.”

“Nn. Will welcome with open arms.”

Yay for more customers!

CHAPTER 109

DISMANTLING

We immediately headed over to the Adventurer's Guild after finally getting back to town.

The monsters we hunted had more than enough meat on them, but we still needed to process it before we could actually put it to use. To that end, we borrowed the guild's dismantling room.

It was much larger than the one they had in Alessa. It had enough room for us to dismantle everything we had on hand and then some.

[Alright, let's start with the Gullinbursti.]

I grabbed the golden boar and pulled it out of storage. We put it away the moment it away the moment it died, so its corpse had been preserved in as fresh a state as possible. In fact, it hadn't even actually finished bleeding out. Magic beast blood was pretty useful when it came to stuff like medicine and food, so we decided to put all the boar's blood back into storage as we butchered it.

"Nn. Tusks very thick."

[Its fur looks like it'd fetch a pretty penny too.]

We only really wanted the beast's meat, but that didn't mean we'd just throw rest away. Its body parts seemed quite valuable.

After finishing up with the boar, we moved onto the Apises and Gullinkambis in turn. All in all, we managed to get a total of about a tonne of "pork," a tonne of "beef," and three hundred kilograms of "chicken." That said, we couldn't actually use it all. Meat was meat, but some of the animals' body parts were more compatible with curry than others.

Hmm... I guess I'll use the "pork" for mild, the "beef" for medium and the "chicken" for hot.

And so, we headed back over to the Luciel Conglomerate after finishing up with all our dismantling. We might've actually ended up missing the cooking guild's deadline if we didn't buy all our ingredients and get all our documentation done immediately.

[We should try checking with the conglomerate to see if they know where we can get ourselves some a room to cook in or something after we pick up all our stuff.]

"Nn."

[Oh yeah, did you want to go check out the orphanage? It's on the way.]

"Orphanage? Can't eat there."

[Well, yeah, but there's more to it than just that.]

Apparently, most stalls wouldn't move all that far from their base of operations. For example, The Dragon's Table stall would sit right in front of the store, and the orphanage's stall would sit right in front of the orphanage. It was pretty easy to resupply given their immediate proximity to their associates, moreover, they could make use of their brands in order to attract a larger crowd of customers. I figured that we might as well find out where the orphanage's stall would be given that it was en route anyways.

So with that in mind, we ended up paying the orphanage a quick visit, just to give it a look, but we were greeted by a bit of an unusual scenario.

"Kyaaa!"

"Waahhh! Wahhhhh!!"

"Alright, who's fault wazzat? Whoever it was, get yer ass over here right now!"

A bunch of commotion was coming from within the orphanage's gates. That is, we were greeted by the sounds of children crying and screaming, and the angry-sounding voice of an ill-mannered man.

CHAPTER 110

THE SHADOWS OF CONSPIRACY

“Hey! Ya recognize this?”

“W-Well...”

“It’s the stupid god damned recipe you gave me!”

We’d approached the orphanage in order to scout out one of our competitors, but we were immediately greeted by a series of furious shouts upon arrival.

The yells that came from within were excessively loud. We could easily hear them from outside the stone wall that enclosed the building. Our curiosity got the better of us, and we peeped in from the entrance so we could figure out exactly what was going on.

“I’m not about to let you get away with sayn that you ain’t got no recollection of this god damn recipe.”

“Y-Yeah, I get it. I do remember, it’s the recipe you forced me to give you. You said you’d leave us alone if I handed it over.”

“Are you fucken retarded? I told you to hand over the soup recipe you use for the goddamn contest every goddamn year.”

“I-I did already.”

It looked like the orphanage was being harassed by a typical, a loan shark-esque grunt. They mentioned a recipe a few times, so it seemed like they were talking about something related to the contest.

The grunt that’d been shouting at the top of his lungs looked like like your usual everyday hoodlum.

A single woman stood between him and children, as if protecting the latter. She looked middle aged, and was wearing a robe over her overly thin figure.

“Did ya think you could get by just handing me off this incomplete piece of shit? There aint even any precise amounts, all you got is fucken guesswork written down here.”

“But that’s just how I normally prepare it...”

“Hah? Shut the hell up. You and I both know that there ain’t no way in hell you can get past the prelims like that. This shit basically just says that you throw a bunch of random cheap ass vegetables into a stupid fucking pot. The fuck you think you’re trying to fool, bitch?”

“That really is how I prepare it! I don’t normally use any sort of measuring device at all. I just approximate!”

It looked like the the piece of paper the hoodlum was waving around contained the recipe for the orphanage’s signature soup. I’m pretty sure he used some sort of underhanded method to get his hands on it, but either way, he was complaining that it lacked completeness. And honestly, he technically was right. The recipe really didn’t have much written on it.

However, the woman wasn’t lying. She’d been telling him the truth from the very start.

She simply never figured out exactly how much of each ingredient she used, but she managed to get fourth place overall last year in spite of that. I had to say that the sense of dissonance going on there really got me curious, and so, I appraised her, only to find that she, Io, was just about as amazing as one could possibly get as far as cooking went. She had cooking level nine, a skill that enhanced her sense of taste, and most importantly, divine protection from the God of Cuisine. In other words, she had been chosen by none other than the God that governed the realm of food himself.

To her, the act of approximating was probably akin to other people meticulously calculating exactly what was needed at any given point in time, except that it was done on the fly. In other words, she probably just went with her gut feeling while occasionally sampling her dish from time to time. Through the aforementioned method, she’d extract from her ingredients the best possible taste she could, regardless of their quality. It was a brilliant concept, but not one that the hoodlum before us could come to understand.

“I told you to cut the shit already!”

Annnnd yup. Figured as much.

(Master. Going to help.)

[Don't hit him too hard, alright?]

(Nn. Got it.)

Fran used magic to silence the area, leapt over the fence, and snuck behind the hoodlum without alerting him.

"Listen here, bit-charhgh!"

She drilled her foot into the back of his head and caused his eyes to roll backwards. The hoodlum had been instantly deprived of his consciousness.

Wait, didn't she say that she knew she was supposed like, not be too violent? I swear I told her that and that she agreed. I swear...

[Hey um, Fran? Whatever happened to not hitting him too hard?]

(Nn? Didn't kill. Didn't cut either.)

Er, I guess it'd be better for me to define "too hard" next time. Oh well, whatever. What's done is done.

"I-I-I'm not sure as to who you are, but thank you very much for your assistance!"

Io thanked us repeatedly before finally calming down, at which point in time we asked her exactly what had happened.

"We're not really all that sure either..."

Io seemed to not understand much about the precise events that transpired, but, she still tried her best to tell us everything she did know. Fortunately, her words were enough to give a rough idea as to the general circumstances.

It all started a few years ago. Barbra's lord had suddenly stopped funding the

orphanage for reasons unknown, and since then, they'd been suffering financially due to their lack of sustainable income. They were in such dire straits that they found it difficult to even scrape up enough money to allow the children to eat everyday.

They requested the lord to change his mind time and time again, but, he never once agreed to reinstate their funding. The orphanage was later approached by a merchant apparently introduced by said lord. He'd been willing to lend them money at a low interest rate, but that didn't end up working out either.

"The merchant refused to budge on the repayment date, and said that it was set in stone, but it was way too unrealistic. There was no way we could possibly make three hundred thousand Golde in just half a year... We wanted to ask him to extend deadline, but we were never able to find his whereabouts."

"Nn? Unable to find whereabouts?"

"The director did his very best to try and locate the merchant, but we never were able to figure out where he went. It turned out that he wasn't actually registered with Barbra's Merchant's Guild."

Okay yeah, if that isn't suspicious, then I don't know what is. In fact, it was pretty obvious that they were just being used and exploited from the very start. I mean, they were offered a decently sized loan with low interest rate loan right when they needed it. Moreover, they were asked to repay it within an impossibly quick time frame. The merchant had obviously wanted something other than money, and they probably would've ended up saying that they didn't get the money even if they had been paid.

Honestly, it was a pretty cliché situation. The only difference was that they were demanding the soup's recipe as opposed to more normal things like the orphanage's land or children.

"That hoodlum. Merchant's underling?"

"I think so. He told us to hand him the recipe instead of paying them back in half a year."

Okay, yeah, looks like this probably does have something to do with the whole cooking contest. But wouldn't setting this whole thing up need a lot of prep work? They basically just threw down three hundred thousand Golde for no reason too. Though, I

guess most chefs wouldn't find three hundred thousand to be all that much considering that they were probably investing more than just that into this whole contest thing.

I mean, fine, that can be justified, but why only the recipe? Couldn't they have just forced the orphanage not to participate instead?

Yeahhhh, I don't get it. I kind of want to interrogate the hoodlum we have over here, but, that probably wasn't exactly the best idea. Using violence would ultimately end up bringing trouble to the orphanage as well, sooooo yeah, let's not.

Doing it after dragging him elsewhere wouldn't work either. I'd really like to avoid getting targeted by some sort of weird underground organisation.

(Master. What to do with hoodlum?)

[Hmmm... Well, we can't really just ditch and not say anything, so let's mess with his head a bit, I guess.]

(Nn!)

The fact that he didn't see Fran sneak up on him gave us more than just a few options. We had everything we needed to deal with this situation however we pleased.

[Alright, make sure you stick to the plan.]

"Nn. Heal."

"Huh?"

"Woke up?"

"Ugh... What happened?"

"Passed out while conversing."

"I did?"

"Nn. Adventurer. Happened to be passing by, witnessed your collapse. Used recovery

magic to help.”

The plan we had ended up going with was pretending that we had nothing to do with the man collapsing at all. In fact, we wanted him to feel as if we’d lent him a hand.

“Sorry, seems like I caused you a bitta trouble.”

“Suddenly collapsing. Sign of serious illness. If collapsing while talking, might be late stages.”

“R-Really? You serious?”

“Nn. Need to leave now. Might be better to get some rest.”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right.”

“Good idea.”

“H-Hey, you shits! I’mma be leaving for now, but don’t think I won’t be back! You owe me a recipe goddamit!”

I managed to project the effects of the Principle of Falsehood onto Fran’s words because she had me equipped. Honestly, I was quite surprised that it actually worked.

Fran was really bad at acting, but the skill’s effects, combined with the fact that he was still groggy, made it so he ended up believing her wholeheartedly. He gave the orphanage one last angry shout before finally turning around and limping his way out the entrance.

[Urushi, follow him.]

[Growl.]

At the very least, having Urushi follow the man around would allow him to memorize his scent. If we were lucky, he’d be able to figure who the man’s companions were, and if we were really lucky, we might even be able to figure out the so called mysterious loan shark’s identity. In any case, it was still win-win situation, as knowing the man’s scent would allow us to track his actions and prevent him from pulling a fast one during the contest itself.

Five or so minutes passed.

“Thank you so much for everything you’ve done for us. Are you sure you don’t want anything else?”

“Nn.”

Fran was currently inside the orphanage. Io had asked her whether or not she wanted anything in return for helping them out, and so, the adventurer had asked to try some of the orphanage’s ever so famous soup, to which the caretaker responded with an okay.

“Thank you.”

The person in question herself didn’t think that the soup really sufficed as thanks, as it was basically only made with the cheapest of vegetables. But in spite of that fact, it was delicious, so delicious that it’d even caused Fran’s expression to change.

[How is it?]

I asked Fran the question despite already knowing the answer she’d give. Her face was twisted in what could only be described as frustration.

(Yummy.)

[Better than the soup I make?]

(Nn... Soup stock extracted perfectly. Tastes miralculous.)

I had to agree that the soup’s taste seemed to have been the work of some sort of miracle. It wasn’t like any of the stuff we saw at the other restaurants. Its was comprised of cheap vegetables, well water, and salt. That was it. Nothing more, nothing less. I had Fran double check by asking her, and it turned out that she really hadn’t even used any pepper. Yet, it still tasted even better than the stuff I made. Like, holy crap. It was just that amazing. She was probably honestly Barbra’s most talented chef.

“Entering King of Cooking?”

“That’s the plan.”

“Going to use this soup?”

“Yes, I am. Barbra’s people are really nice. They know about how much trouble we’re having with our finances, so they’re even willing to pay as much as 10 Golde for just a single bowl. I’m really grateful for their actions, the earnings we make from the contest have been helping us by. We probably wouldn’t have lasted as long as we did without everyone’s generosity...”

She didn’t have much self confidence and seemed to believe that people only bought her soup as a form of donation. Well, I mean, I can’t say that sympathy didn’t play a part in the soup’s sales figures, but honestly, the soup would’ve sold well even without it. I mean, just look at how Fran reacted. It was so good that it’d caused her emotions to well up in frustration.

Her price point was the same as ours, but each bowl would earn her much more profit than each serving of curry bread would for us given the discrepancy in the cost of our ingredients. She’s going to be making something far outside the realm of just one gold per sale. Her fourth place spot was rightfully deserved.

A thin, freckled girl approached us as Fran finished her soup. She presented to her a small plate with a single cookie lying on top of it.

“What’s that?”

“It’s supposed to be my snack, but I’m giving it to you because you helped Ms. Io. Thank you, *onee-chan*.”^[1]

She pushed the cookie towards Fran whilst smiling shyly. She probably really wanted it for herself, but she was willing to give it up regardless.

What a good girl she is! I mean, she can’t hold a candle to Fran, but she’s still a really good girl!

Fran split the cookie with the girl and ate it while giving her head a gentle rub. Fran

was always used to being treated as a child, so she seemed really happy that someone had looking up to her as something along the lines of an elder sister.

Alright, you know what? I've come to a conclusion. Barbra's lord is a piece of shit. He ended abandoning some city's most adorable children. How dare he discontinue his funding!

[I think it's time for us to get in touch with *her*.]

(Nn. Agreed.)

The guild has the ability to quickly send messages to other branches, meaning we should be able to get in touch with the Alessa branch fairly easily.

"Won't stay silent. Amanda, that type of person."

[Yup, let's do what we can for them.]

And so, we left the orphanage, but not before leaving with them some of the stuff we bought back in Alessa and Dharz. We gave them grains, potatoes, dried meat, and dried fish, stuff meant to last a while even if you just kept it on the shelf. The quantity we had on hand was rather limited, but hopefully, it was at least enough to brighten their days and let them eat healthier, more delicious meals.

CHAPTER 111

PREPARING THINGS IN ADVANCE

The first thing we did after leaving the orphanage was to head over to the Adventurer's Guild so we could ask them to assist us in sending the Alessa branch a message.

I'd assumed that all communication was done through the use of some sort of magic item, so I was completely blindsided by the fact that they were using carrier pigeons. Well, not exactly carrier pigeons, but something along those lines. To be precise, the messages were being carried by hawk-like magic beasts.

The carrier hawks' were a species of magic beast called Wind Eagles. They specialized in high speed flight, and as a result, were ranked as E level threats. In fact, they were so quick that the one we'd just sent over to Alessa was due to reach its destination within the day.

The hawks were really convenient given the fact that they could cover large amounts of ground in very little time, but the guild didn't actually have all that many on hand. Even the Barbra branch only had two in total. As one could presume from that fact alone, they were not only expensive to use, but also fairly busy. I guess you could say that we were pretty lucky that our message was actually sent off immediately.

And by the way, expensive meant *expensive*. Sending just that one letter cost us an entire ten thousand Golde. Ten thousand! I'd almost felt like just taking our money and flat out donating it to the orphanage instead, but I ended up sending the letter anyways, as I rationalized that it would still probably end up be the better investment in the long run.

Now, with that said, Fran and I were both fully aware that Amanda wasn't actually allowed to leave Alessa, but that didn't mean she wouldn't be able to help us. It might be possible for her to pull a few strings in order to get Barbra's lord to start giving the orphanage money again. Likewise, we might also be able to make use her name in order to discourage those that looked at the orphanage with their eyes filled with malicious intent.

Naturally, the letter contained more than just our request for assistance. We first

wrote a bit about ourselves and our most recent experiences and accomplishments before moving to explaining the orphanage's less than satisfactory circumstances. The reason we saved the orphanage stuff for last was so we could purposefully finish the letter off by saying, "There are many children in need that would greatly benefit from your help. Could you please lend them a hand?" It had much more impact that way. I was aware that we were kind of just pushing the whole thing onto her, but we didn't hesitate in seeking her help. We figured that Amanda would have more than enough influence and ability to actually get something done. This was more than just our problem, so I felt it necessary to make use of every resource we possibly could.

"Woof woof."

[Welcome back, Urushi.]

Urushi came back from his hoodlum-filled adventure right as we finished up all our guild-related business.

I kind of wanted to head over to the Luciel Conglomerate immediately, but I was more interested in the result of Urushi's investigations, so we first decided to follow him back to the place from which he just returned despite it being in the conglomerate's opposite direction.

[So he went in here?]

"Woof."

Urushi had guided us over to the town's residential area, where we found ourselves standing before a massive mansion with a five meter tall fence lining its property. Its size was indicative of the fact that it probably belonged to some sort of noble.

I'd really wished that it had something as convenient as a nameplate, but reality was pretty much never that convenient.

What we needed was information. We couldn't make any sort of decision or come to any sort of conclusion without it, so we decided to ask around and gather as much of it as we could.

Fran's still a kid, so luckily, her posing a few questions wouldn't really lead to her being suspected of anything malicious. All she needed to do to get people to divulge the

information she wanted was to put on a bit of an act. It was a shame that Urushi couldn't get any smaller, else we could probably use him to play the good old puppy card as well.

Whenever we came across a man, we'd have Fran give her head a bit of a tilt whilst gazing up into his eyes. Seeing her act like that pretty much caused every man we came across to immediately become as obedient as could be.

"Hey, mister?"

"Y-Yes? Did you need something?"

Most of them reacted as if they were charmed. It seemed like having Fran interact with them in the manner she had had caused them to awaken to a new sort of interest. Whoops, my bad. That uh, wasn't intentional. Hahaha...

Women were approached in a much more natural fashion. They seemed to act much more amicably when Fran retained her usual, expressionless face.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

"Yes?"

"That mansion. Looks really big. Owned by nobles?"

"Now that you mention it, I think it might be biggest one in this neighborhood, so maybe."

"Looks like owner has bad taste. Poorly decorated."

"Ahahaha, you're right about that one. No one knows exactly who owns it though."

"Don't know?"

"Well, this is just a rumor, but, apparently it's currently being occupied by some shady folk. They say that you only ever see people going in and out of the building in the middle of the night."

"Illegal, underground organisation?"

“That’s what I thought too, but I hear that some of the carriages that visit the building on a regular basis are said to have the city’s lord’s crest on them.”

“Lord involved with underground?”

“I don’t know about that. The lord isn’t the only one that has access to carriages with his crest on it.”

Most of the conversations we had were more or less along that same vein. In the end, we never were able to figure out exactly who the mansion belonged to. All we got were more rumours about how the place was being used by “bad people.” Moreover, everyone we conversed with would always lower their voices and check their surroundings before telling us anything about the aforementioned rumours.

[Hey Urushi, were there a lot of people inside?]

(Woof. Bark bark.)

Urushi replied with several dog noises in order to answer my question affirmatively.

[Hmm... then breaking in probably isn’t that great an idea.]

I mean, they were suspicious and all, but we didn’t actually have any evidence of their guilt.

Oh well, whatever. We figured out where their base was. That alone more than sufficed for the time being.

[Did you memorize their scents?]

(Woof.)

We don’t know if they’ll actually try to interfere with our business at all, but it was much better to be safe than sorry.

Alright, next up, the Luciel Conglomerate! They even might have a bit of info on this place as well, who knows?

And so, time passed; an hour flew by as we went about our business.

“Alright! I think that should be all of it.”

“Nn. Thanks.”

“Don’t sweat it, the pleasure was mine. Make sure you knock the contest’s other participants out of the water.”

The oil, vegetables, and flour that we ordered from the conglomerate were already all prepped for us, so we went ahead and picked them up. I was honestly quite surprised by how quickly they managed to get everything ready, I guess their size and reputation really weren’t just for show. Rengil had actually gone out of his way to get us a carriage and some professional help for the sake of transporting all the goods we bought, so he was left completely stupefied by the fact that we managed to casually just store it all away within another dimension. I felt kind of guilty for putting his effort to waste, but well, we didn’t really need what we didn’t need. That’s kind of just how things were.

He was really impressed by the amount of storage space we had. In fact, he’d even gone as far as to ask us whether or not we would be willing to work in transport going forward. Users of space/time magic would often have large item boxes, and the size of their dimensional pockets would scale with their degree of skill, but most weren’t even able to come anywhere close to reproducing anything as spacious as what we had. Space/time magicians were already rare enough as is, so what we had was something along the lines of a one in a million enigma. It made sense though, we weren’t just using space/time magic, we also had a separate dimensional storage skill. It would’ve been weird for us not stand out. Apparently, most merchants would be willing to pay out the ass for that much storage space.

Our purchases weren’t limited to just edibles. We’d also ordered from the conglomerate a bunch of paper bags so that we could make things easier on our customers. Much to my surprise, Barbra had access to such a vast supply of paper that even the common folk were seen using it on a regular basis. Apparently, paper products were, in general, split into two categorizations. Regular paper was pretty much used by just about everybody, whereas parchment was only used for tasks involving magic.

Either way, the paper bags we got from the conglomerate were identical to the ones I was used to seeing back in Japan, just... not as high quality. They were plain, brown,

made of cheap material, and came in two sizes. The smaller size fit up to two servings of curry bread, and the larger size six. Each bag also had a bit of an open grip on top in order to make it easier to carry.

“We still have a lot of those bags in stock, so feel free to just drop by if you ever need any more.”

“Nn. Got it.”

Another thing we did before departing was asking Rengil if he knew anything about the mansion we’d just investigated. Unfortunately, he didn’t. However, he did get all heated up after hearing about the orphanage’s circumstances. He said that he was going to ask a few of his contacts to do some investigation, for which we were thankful.

“And last but not least would be... this.”

“Key?”

“I think you mentioned something about needing a place to cook, right? That key’ll get you into a restaurant that shut down about a month ago. No one’s bought the place yet, so it’s kind of just been sitting there without purpose. We’ve left the place as it was when it got vacated, so it should still have all the necessary utensils and the like. I don’t particularly mind lending it to you for a few days.”

He showed us over to the so called abandoned restaurant. The stove and stuff still all looked intact, and there was even an area to store water in the back. The conglomerate had been taking good care of the place despite it being empty, so it wasn’t really all dusty or anything like that. It was pretty much exactly what we needed, and so, we ended up borrowing it for about a week’s worth of time.

Alright! That’s everything we need. All we need to do now is to carry it all over to the Chef’s Guild so we can report our costs. Errr, wait, no. I have to get all the water ready first.

[Okay, why don’t we get down to making that magic-infused water we were going to use?]

“Nn. Where? Bathroom?”

[I think it'd be better if we used soil magic to make ourselves a pool or something.]

There was a large dirt floor to one side of the kitchen we were given, so we didn't have to worry about anyone overseeing our activities. But first, we actually needed to do a quick experiment. That is, we needed to figure out how much of the Potion of Attribute Reversal we needed to use per litre of swamp water. We also needed to determine whether it'd be better to use the swamp water or the Highest Grade Poison Mixture as our base. To that end, I started by making a bunch of smaller containers so we could do all the testing we needed.

"Nn. Looks interesting."

"Woof. Ruff."

"Next, this."

"Bark bark!"

"Nn? This one?"

"Woof!"

Our tests ended up taking the form of something along the lines of a science experiment; we mixed a bunch of chemicals and watched as they reacted with each other whilst documenting the results. Fran had so much fun with it that she even ended up getting Urushi to secrete a bit of his poison so she could conduct some additional testing.

The cost of our products would skyrocket if we used stuff that was way too effective, so, after consulting with Rengil, we ended up coming to the conclusion that it'd best for us to use the Water of Recovery. The Water of Recovery had the ability to restore any negative status conditions inflicted within the past few days. The aforementioned limitation seemed to function as compensation for the prominence of its effects.

I didn't really get the whole distinction, but apparently, it didn't count as a potion. A potion was strictly defined as a type of medicine. For some odd reason, magic-infused water didn't fit under that classification and instead was put in its own category.

Either way, we experimented. We mixed a whole bunch of swamp water, poison,

magically created water, and alchemically created water in the name of science.

It took a whole bunch of testing, but in the end we finally managed to find the right mixture and ultimately mass produce the Water of Recovery that we'd been wanting. Though, I think we ended up producing way too much of the stuff. Oh well, again, better safe than sorry, so whatever.

[Whew. That's everything. Let's whip up a quick test batch and then head on over to the Chef's Guild.]

"Nn. Finally."

CHAPTER 112

CURRY BREAD COMPLETE!

[Alright, they're done.]

The batch I had in front me looked almost identical to the stuff I used to see in stores back when I was still in Japan.

"Leave taste testing to me."

"Woof woof bark woof!"

Both Fran and Urushi approached with their tails wagging the moment I pulled the curry bread out of the oil. They literally didn't even give me a chance to wring it dry. Didn't they already have their afternoon snacks? I could've sworn they did...

[Hold on a bit. Wait till all the oil drips off of it.]

"Whaaa"

"Whimper..."

Both impatiently sat down right in front of the final product I'd just produced. Sitting there and staring isn't going to make time go by any faster, you know...?

There were three different types and six pieces of each type for a total of 18 servings overall. The first type was mild and filled with pork, its exterior was the most plain, and appeared to have a simple, reddish-brown shade. The second type had slightly spicier beef curry inside of it, and could be differentiated by a thin layer of red pepper powdered atop its exterior. The final type was made of chicken. Unlike the other two, it was made to be super spicy. Moreover, it was the only one decorated in green; its exterior was accented with a parsey-like vegetable.

It took about fifteen minutes for the curry bread to cool down a bit and all the excess oil to dry off. Funny enough, neither Fran nor Urushi had seemed to avert their gazes for even the slightest moment.

I immediately stored half of them away so we could pass a few samples over to the Chef's Guild. The other half, I left to a certain pair of gluttons.

[They're ready now, go ahead and dig in.]

"Nn!"

"Woof woof!"

Both immediately pounced upon the dish the moment they got the green light.

"Yummy yummy yummy."

"Ruff ruff ruff."

Fran finished one of the pork types in a mere three bites. Naturally, she didn't manage to swallow it immediately, so I asked her for her impressions as she chewed.

[How is it?]

"Ideal. Curry with rice reaches heavens. Curry bread ascends to nirvana."

"Woof!"

The hell is she saying? Are we in cooking manga land right now or something?

Oh well, whatever. Either way, it's delicious, and that's all that matters.

"This one. Also tasty."

"Woof."

[Looks like Urushi likes the second type more than he likes the first. What about you, Fran?]

"Can't decide. Both equally delicious."

It looked like Fran even liked the one with medium levels of spiciness. Hmm... What

about the spiciest kind?

“Spicy. Yummy. Spicy.”

[Woof woof woof!]

Alright, looks like that didn't really work for her nearly as well as the other two did. Urushi, on the other hand, liked the spiciest type the most.

Hmm... alright, so how much of each type should I make? I mean, the super spicy type isn't really for everybody, but I'm sure some people will be craving it... Wait, what if I started with just the two less spicy types and then added the third type on the second day? I'm pretty sure that'd end up grabbing more customers because people would start talking about it.

[Oh well, either way, it looks like they're pretty good, so let's pack up and head over to the Chef's Guild for the time being.]

“Nn. Got it.”

We were shown to a large underground room after we arrived at the Chef's Guild. It's ceiling was rather expensive and fancy looking, but for some odd reason, its size seemed to make it feel more like a gym than some sort of expensive facility.

“Could you please place all the ingredients you're going to be using in this room? We can head over to where you've got your ingredients stored in the case that you've got too many to carry. The same applies if it's too difficult for you transport them over.”

“Fine. No problems.”

“Are you sure? I don't think it'll be that efficient for you to have to keep going back and forth even if you do have an item box...”

“Nn. Taking ingredients out now.”

“Huh? Wait, what?”

Fran had entered the room empty-handed, so the receptionist seemed to have assumed that she'd brought some stuff via an item box and left the rest in a warehouse

or something.

Apparently that's how most of the other contestants did things. They'd normally call a representative over instead of actually going to the guild and bringing all their materials with them.

The shock the receptionist experienced from seeing Fran pull item after item out of her dimensional storage had initially caused her to stare with a blank look on her face, but she quickly recovered and started to do her job.

She immediately began using a skill in order to assess the value of what we'd brought.

"Let's see... Vegetables, flour, a barrel of oil, a large quantity of spices, and..."

She recorded each of her observations in a notepad as she went through them.

"Is this magic-infused water? How luxurious. Wow, you've even got Gullinbursti, Apis, and Gullinkambi meat!"

It took her about an hour to go through everything. All in all, our ingredients were worth about a hundred and fifty thousand Golde. If we used them all up, we'd end up making about thirty thousand servings of curry bread, meaning we'd profit five Golde a piece if we kept our prices at 10 Golde each. The cost was actually a lot higher than what I'd anticipated it to be.

That said, it wasn't actually that bad. It would've been much worse in Japan given that we would've had to pay for utilities and all sorts of other overhead costs. Labour costed much more over there too.

Most of the contest's participants were chefs who focused purely on the pursuit of taste. As a result, their costs were rather high, and naturally, the prices for their products followed the same general sort of trend. Our strategy, which involved selling a large quantity at a low price, seemed like it was quite viable in comparison.

Another important factor to note was that the profit calculation itself was actually a bit skewed. It only included ingredients used directly in the dishes themselves, so stuff like labour and the cost of our paper bags were ignored and considered personal expenses as opposed to business expenses. That said, contestants were prohibited from bundling their dishes with overly expensive tableware as it'd skew the results in

favour of anyone that happened to have extra cash on hand.

“Alright, next, we’ll need a sample of your product so that we can judge its qualifications.”

“Nn.”

“Wow! What a delicious yet mysterious flavour it has.”

The employee seemed to be well deserving of her position, given that she was able to immediately recognize the curry bread’s flavour as an uncommon one. Moreover, the very first bite had already led her to nod in approval.

“I see, so you’re planning to put out multiple different flavours. The taste seems to match with the ingredients used, so you should be good to go.”

She used the “Tongue of Analysis” skill in order to examine the curry bread as she ate it. Its effect was to immediately identify every ingredient used in whatever she was eating. Okay, seriously, are we in a cooking manga right now? Because that’s totally something that looked like it was ripped right out of one.

The staff member lead us over to a place with a whole bunch of different carts and stalls after she finished checking over our ingredients. All participants had to pick one of several types pre-prepared by the guild.

We immediately chose one that didn’t really have that big of a prep area. Instead, it had a large display area with enough space for three different sales people.

Another requirement that we’d yet to fulfill was the creation of the sign we were going to hang atop our stall. The guild said that we could just figure out a design and hand it to them. They’d handle the rest. Our shop’s name was going to be called The Black Tail, so we just quickly drew a black cat’s tail and stuck the shop’s name beside it before calling it a day.

And that was pretty much it. The only other thing we had to do was hand over the recipe. After that, we’d be golden.

“This.”

“Right, the recipe. Don’t worry about it leaking out to the public. We’re extremely

careful and will ensure that it won't happen."

"Nn. Done now?"

"Y-Yes, you are, but I do have to say that you sure did treat your recipe really casually."

"Nn?"

"Most of our participants enclose it in an envelope in order to ensure that it isn't seen by any unintended onlookers. They're also usually quite hesitant about handing over their recipes."

We kind of just scribbled it on a piece of paper and handed it to them, so I guess it only makes sense for the staff members to be relatively confused.

"They tend to get especially fussy when their dishes are as unique and original as your own."

"Not making fuss because trusting guild."

"That's good to hear. Your trust is well placed, we promise that we'll do our best to keep it safeguarded."

"Then no problem at all."

Honestly, we could care less if the recipe ended up getting out anyways. It's not actually an original recipe in the first place, so I don't really feel the urge to be all secretive about it or anything like that.

I mean, we could honestly probably sell it for a lot, but, weren't really in need of money or anything, and we'd probably make more from hunting magic beasts anyway.

Besides, I don't actually see any problems with having the recipe leak. In fact, Fran would probably be happier that way. Local adaptations of it would likely lead to even more variety, which, in turn, would mean more curry for her.

So to sum that all up, there's no point in us intentionally giving out the recipe for free, but we wouldn't really care even if it did get leaked.

[Alright, let's head back and start getting everything ready.]

"Nn."

Awesome. Time for me to stay up all night and make about five thousand of each type of curry bread. I was planning to have Fran make a few in person at the stall, but honestly, that was just something we were going to do to attract customers. Most of what we were going to sell would be made in advance. We won't have to worry about our supplies running dry that way.

I mean, normally, you'd be concerned about the excess food going to waste, but that didn't really apply to us. We could keep it in storage for as long as we wanted, and neither Urushi nor Fran would mind keeping them around as snacks.

"Well if it isn't Miss Fran!"

"Colbert? Here, why?"

Colbert called out to us the moment we left the Chef's Guild's basement and went back to its lobby.

"I was actually looking for you! The contest's going to start tomorrow, so I was checking to see if you need any sort of help."

You could tell at a glance that he was totally brimming with excitement and motivation.

"I can tell you for a fact that I really do just want to help! I'm totally not hoping that there's a chance I'll be able to sample a bit of the Master's cuisine. Not at all."

Oh, so that's what he was actually after. Well, I guess that's fair. I don't mind feeding him a bit if that's all it takes for him to lend us a hand.

(Master, what do?)

[Maybe try asking him if he knows anyone that could help out as a salesperson?]

I was actually planning on having Rengil refer us a few people, but, an adventurer would probably work even better seeing as how they could function as both a salesperson and a guard simultaneously.

“Looking for people to help with sales. Requirement. Good at math. Even better if can cook. Ideally party of three.”

“Just leave it to me! I’ll find you three helpers by tomorrow morning!”

“Paying well.”

“Got it, that should make things even easier. I’ll get you the best help possible, just you wait!”

Alright, that’s that out of the way. We still have two days left until the second round actually begins. In the meantime, I’ll make sure I cook up the world’s best ever curry bread!

[You want to help out, Fran?]

“Nn. Will do my best.”

[I’ll leave keeping watch to you, Urushi!]

“Woof woof!”

CHAPTER 113

THE LUNAR BANQUET

Silence filled the kitchen as we got ready to cook.

First up on our list of things to prepare was spices.

Not all the spices we had on hand would actually serve to improve the flavour of our curry bread, so we had to sort them and put the ones we weren't going to use aside. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that our choice of spices could either make or break the final product altogether. Next, we began mixing the spices with as much care as humanly pos—

— Or not. I'd planned on proceeding with caution, but Urushi totally chucked that out the window by sniffing at our ingredients. Normally, that alone wasn't much of a cause for concern, but it caused a chain reaction by sending a few spices flying towards Fran, who in turn sneezed and then caused more spices to go all over the place.

[Alright, how about you guys go do something else while I get all the spices prepped?]

“Nn.”

“Whimper...”

I'd honestly wanted to use a doppelganger so I could check the taste and smell as I went along with the whole cooking process, but I ended up dropping the idea altogether. I couldn't maintain my doppelgangers for all that long, so it'd be better to keep the skill off cooldown just in case we happened to run into some sort of emergency.

I asked Fran to focus on prepping the other ingredients. It'd not only prevent any additional incidents, but also help a lot in the long run, as I wouldn't have to deal with nearly as much prep work myself later.

“Will prep well.”

“Woof?”

[Hmm, yeah, it doesn't really look like there's anything for you to do. Sorry Urushi.]

“Whimper whimper...”

[Yeah, I know you want to help, but it is what it is.]

“Woof woof woof!”

[I know, I can see that, but I'm not really sure how trying harder's going to change anything.]

“Bark!”

[It's not a matter of how many limbs you use to walk so that's not going to help either.]

Urushi seemed to be trying to stand on his hind legs as if to demonstrate that he could use his front paws in much the same manner as a human being. His legs were clearly shaking though, so it evidently wasn't what you'd normally call the best idea.

That said, seeing him act all gung ho really made me want to find him something to do.

Let's see... he's much pretty limited to using only his mouth and front paws. The former was much more reliable than the latter, so we'd need something that wouldn't suffer from him holding it in his mouth all the time.

[Oh, I know. How about helping me make the butter?]

“Woof?”

[One sec.]

I grabbed a barrel out of the dimensional storage. Inside was freshly squeezed milk, obtained from none other than our friend at the Luciel Conglomerate. The plan was to use it in order to create butter which would then be used for the chicken broth we needed to flavour the spiciest variation. I was originally planning to just use of space/time magic, but this was one of the few things that Urushi could actually do, so

might as well leave it up to him instead.

To begin, I had him return to his usual size.

[Hey Urushi, open wide.]

“Bark.”

[Catch.]

“Woof?”

[Make sure you don't bite down, alright? The barrel's made out of wood, so it'll probably break if you do.]

“Woof.”

[Alright, you don't actually need to do anything super complicated. All you have to do is start shaking it as hard as you can and not stop till I tell you to.]

“W-Woof...?”

[Hey, you're the one who said you wanted to help, so get to work already.]

“W-Woof!”

Urushi obediently started to reproduce the ever so well known phenomenon of violent headbanging in response to my commands. All he had to do was keep that up for an hour, and we'd have butter! Though, he'd also probably be a bit more than just a bit dizzy, but hey, whatever. He asked for it.

And with that, both Fran and Urushi had something to keep them busy, so I went back to working on the spices.

Time flew as we concentrated our assigned tasks; the evening had almost seemed have blindsided us.

Urushi was, as one would expect, no longer able to stand on his feet. He'd been wobbling about in one of the room's corners ever since he completed his task.

[You guys want to take a break and go check out the Lunar Banquet?]

“Nn. Will visit food stalls.”

[That’s not really what I meant. There’s going to be a parade and stuff. I was thinking we might as well go see what it’s all about.]

“Nn. Lots of delicious food.”

[Well, that works too I guess.]

The city had already shifted gears into festival mode. The streets were lined with stalls, and filled to the brim with people.

[Things sure did get lively around here.]

“Nn. Nom nom.”

[Wait a second, you’re eating already!?!]

“Nn. Grilled Squid.”^[1]

“Crunch crunch.”

[Man, and now Urushi’s even got himself a chunk of bone-in meat? Aren’t you guys being a little *too* quick about this? It hasn’t even been a minute since we got outside, you know?]

And wait, wasn’t Urushi totally about to collapse because of how dizzy he was just a second ago?

“Heard the call of tasty food.”

“Woof.”

I guess stuff like that doesn’t matter so long as their stomachs are involved, or something like that.

Fran moved through the street whilst weaving in and out crowd and going back and forth between the two sides. She visited every stall she pleased, and didn't let anything stop her food-filled advance.

It didn't take long for us start to hear the sound of music, and I wasn't talking Japanese style festival music. It most closely resembled something out of Europe, but seemed to have a bit of an African-ish flavour mixed into it as well.

We started moving towards the sound's source, and eventually found a five member band playing a performance by the roadside. Their instruments actually looked quite like what I used to seeing back on Earth. That is, the musicians were making use of violin and pipe-like objects to create their melodies.

Enjoying ourselves once again caused time to fly right by, and before we knew it, the sun had vanished below the horizon.

Dusk was promptly followed by a loud cheer from the festival's participants.

[Oh? Looks like something's happening.]

"Over there. Really big."

[Looks like a float. Wait, is there someone on top of it?]

"Priestess."

[Huh, now that you mention it, her clothes do give off that whole sacred type of vibe.]

Appraising her informed me that she was an oracle. Wait, so can she really hear the gods' voices? If so, then I guess they really do exist, or at least they do in this world anyways.

We wanted to follow the float because they were apparently going to perform a dance for the sake of some sort of ritual, but everyone else seemed to be thinking the same thing, so it ended up getting a bit messy. We ended up more or less being stuck because of all the human traffic, and at this rate, it looked like we'd probably end up missing the ritual altogether.

[Let's get ourselves a birds eye view so we don't have to deal with this anymore.]

“Nn.”

Fran slipped out of the crowd and leapt atop a nearby building. She continued to traverse from rooftop to treetop to rooftop whilst skipping ahead of the float. I felt like we were kind of cheating seeing as how everyone else still had to put up with the crowd and all that, hey, might as well use what you got.

Our final destination ended up being on top of a clocktower that oversaw the square in which the ritual was to take place. I had to say, we had a pretty damned good view.

It seemed that our timing had been pretty much spot on. The float turned into the square right as we finished settling ourselves down.

It didn't take long for them to start the ceremony. The shrine maiden began to offer her prayer in the form of a song, to which the crowd immediately responded by quieting down. Soon the square was filled with nothing but the the sounds of the priestess' voice and the instruments that supported it. This time around, the melody was much more gentle, and seemed to have a bit of a Japanese quality to it.

Six beautiful dancers entered the spotlight as the priestess sang; their silver, shoulder-length hair swayed through the night as they wholeheartedly immersed themselves in their performances.

“Pretty.”

[Yeah.]

I couldn't help but note how practiced and efficient their movements were. It felt as if the dance itself was something usable in battle.

General Information

Name: Charlotte

Age: 16

Race: Human

Job: War Dancer

State: Normal

Status Level: 30/99

HP: 146

MP: 198
STR: 68
VIT: 77
AGI: 141
INT: 96
MGC: 100
DEX: 111

Skills

Evasion: Lv 6
Singing: Lv 5
Wind Magic: Lv 3
Blink: Lv 3
War Dance: Lv 7
War Dance Techniques: Lv 6
Hand to Hand Combat: Lv 3
Close Quarters Combat: Lv 4
Dancing: Lv 8
Water Magic: Lv 3
Vigour Manipulation
Magic Manipulation

Innate Skills

Captivating Dancer

Titles

Priestess of War

Equipment

Magic Steel Ring of Combat
Macaque's Cold Resistance Wear
Pearl Wolf's Mantle
Pearl Wolf's Sandals
Anti-Charm Bracelet
Ankle Bracelet of Beauty

It looked like the dancers all had the War Dancer job. I assumed that the job's main skill would then be War Dance. Hmm, let's check a few things out in a bit more detail.

War Dance: A martial art that allows one to fight while dancing.

War Dance Techniques: A dance that charms onlooking enemies and invigorates one's allies.

Captivating Dancer: Amplifies the effects of any dance-related skills.

So apparently they can fight at dance at the same time. What's with all these manga-like abilities that've been showing up lately? I mean, their weapons were literally the metal rings they were wearing on their persons. I honestly can't say I'm not interested. That looks hella awesome.

Fran pulled out a warm glass of ginger ale as she continued to watch the ritual. She really seemed to have taken a liking to the stuff as of late.

This world's ginger wasn't as spicy as the ginger we had back in Japan. It was much sweeter overall, so most people just straight up ate it as a vegetable instead of using it as a spice. I've never actually seen anyone cook with it, and apparently, Fran had never even heard of ginger ale or ginger pork before. ^[2] ^[3]

"Yum."

"Woof!"

Fran's facial expression relaxed as she leaned onto Urushi and sank into his fur whilst drinking her ginger ale. She was showing a rare, happy smile.

And so, we continued to watch. We watched the singers sing and the dancers dance; we observed the ephemeral scene play out as we overlooked it from what could what could only be described as a VIP seat.

[Looks like it's over.]

"Nn. Was really pretty."

That wasn't a bad show at all. The ritual ceremony was beautiful to behold, and I felt as if it'd really drawn me in. Seeing it made me feel both relaxed and invigorated enough to return to the kitchen and keep up the ever arduous task of preparation.

[1] Grilled squid is a really common thing at Japanese festivals. They normally roast it over a stove, put on a bit of sauce and then serve to you on a skewer. Tends to look something like this.



[2] Japanese ginger ale is a bit different from its western counterpart in the sense that it tends to be closer to something homemade than the soft drink you buy from the store in the west. You also normally have it warm instead of cold. It's good for people with stuffy noses apparently. Take this with a grain of salt though, as I've never actually had it myself. All this is second hand information that indirectly came from a pos slurping a cup of the stuff on the other side of the Earth.



[3] If you go to a Japanese restaurant, you can probably get this. It's called shogayaki, and it's one of Japan's most popular pork-based dishes. I think you can make it with other meat instead, but I s2g that's blasphemy and you deserve to be hanged for it. It's pretty good, and basically, you pour a bunch of ginger sauce on top of a bunch of thin pork slices right when you finish frying them. It's often served with a few greens, and pretty damn good. Oh yeah, it's basically a rule that you have to eat this with rice. Even if you're allergic or something, eat it with rice. It'll be worth it.



CHAPTER 114

GESTURES AND CONFUSION

We headed back to kitchen after watching the festival's main event come to a conclusion. Naturally, the trip back, like the trip there, was accompanied by Fran purchasing what could only be described as an unnecessary amount of food.

[Alright, I've got all my energy back, so I'm about to kick myself into high gear. You guys should probably start getting ready for bed.]

"It's fine. Will help."

"Woof."

[Well, if you're sure, then I'll take you up on that offer.]

"Nn. Can count on me."

"Bark!"

[Sweet. Alright, I guess you can keep working on prepping up the vegetables and stuff then, Fran.]

"Got it."

[And as for you Urushi? You're... also going to be doing the same thing you were before.]

"W-Whimper..."

I handed Urushi another barrel so he could go back to headbanging. Luckily, that would be the last time I needed to have him do it. We needed about six kilograms of butter in total, and the first barrel had managed to produce half of that, so yeah.

Butter was honestly more of a luxury than anything else in the first place. Its market price was way too high for it to be worth it, and to make matters worse, the stuff you

could buy didn't even taste all that great. The butter Urushi made was salt free, fresh, and much more delicious than anything else we could get, so making it ourselves was pretty much resulted in us obtaining a higher quality product for a fraction of the cost. It was one of the ever so desired two birds one stone type situations.

[Do your best. Don't be giving up on me now.]

"Woof!"

The large black wolf ultimately resigned himself to his fate. He lifted the barrel above his head and moved over to a room with a bit of a higher ceiling before finally starting to swing his neck up and down with as much vigour as he could muster.

[I guess I'll get started on the dough next.]

And so, I worked on the task for about two odd hours.

Naturally, both Fran and Urushi needed sleep, so they'd already headed back to the inn. I, on the other hand, was an object, so I used my lack of a need for rest in order to continue working throughout the night.

[Woah, it's already past midnight.]

I felt the urge to go outside and look upon the night sky. I wanted to stare at all seven gleaming moons as they illuminated my darkened surroundings, just as I'd done on the day I reincarnated. But I couldn't. We were in the middle of the city, so there was a chance that someone would spot me as I basked in the moonlight. It was a bit of a shame, but I was honestly still quite content just knowing that they were there.

Well, I could've easily just created a doppelganger and had it look instead, but that was flat out just a waste of the skill's cooldown.

Man, I can't believe I've been here for three whole months already. My life back in Japan had been rather stagnant, and time seemed to move at a snail's pace. Here though, it almost seemed to fly by far too quickly. I guess this is what it means to live out a fulfilling life.

The moment I entertained that thought was the moment everything went back.

[Huh?]

W-Wait, what the hell just happened!? Why couldn't I see anymore? Is this some sort of like bug or error? Wait, how *did* I see in the first place? I had no idea, which meant I also had no idea as to whether or not I was supposed to retain the ability see in the first place. Maybe this is something that's supposed to happen? Please no.

The darkness was suddenly overridden by its opposite right as my thoughts started strolling down panic lane. Everything around me had suddenly been dyed in a shade of pure white.

It looked like there wasn't actually any issue with my sense of sight. Whew. Wait, not whew. Where the hell am I? I can't tell. I looked around, but I was met with the same result regardless of where I cast my gaze. My surroundings seemed to have transformed into an infinite expanse of white. It almost looked like I'd been transported inside the Hyperbolic T*me Chamber or something. Wait, isn't this like totally what you'd normally see in the first chapter of a novel centered around the theme of reincarnating into another world? Am I about to meet some sort of God so I can reincarnate again or something? Wait, wait, wait, did I just jinx it? I'm pretty sure I did. Fuck! Fuck no! I like this world, I'm not about to let myself get ported over to a different one. I've even got unfinished business here. Fran and I are still in the midst of our journey together and I absolutely refuse to leave her side at least until she grows up. I don't care what happens, I won't budge on that at all, regardless of whether or not I'm speaking to some sort of God.

I panicked a bit more while taking in my surroundings. I couldn't actually find anything at the first, but someone suddenly rose out of the ground about ten meters in front me right as I came to the conclusion that the place was empty.

His form was exactly like that of a refined middle aged man's. His silver hair, robe, and laid back appearance really served to exemplify the fact that he was in the prime of his life. He looked a bit thin at first glance, but further inspection led me to understand that he was actually jacked as all hell.

The appearance he had really left an impact on me, but despite that, I couldn't really sense his presence at all. It was like he was some sort of phantom, or a mere illusion. Either way, he didn't really look like a God. Whew.

I tried to approach him so I could inspect him in a bit more detail, but...

[I can't move.]

My body had been completely frozen in place, and it didn't seem like he intended on coming any closer either so I guess that plan was out.

[Who are you?]

The man started to act out a series of gestures instead of answering my question.

[Why do that instead of just talking?]

“_____”

[Huh? I can't tell what you just said. I couldn't hear you.]

“_____”

[Oh! Are you perhaps mute?]

Apparently, I'd the nail on the head. The man immediately pointed at me and smiled while nodding, as if to say “spot on.” However, he soon transitioned back into making more gestures. It was evident that he was trying to tell me something.

I started him down as he continued to with his odd gestures. I was having a hard time deciphering them, but I at least managed to grasp that I wasn't about to be stuck reincarnating again, at least.

Seriously though, what the hell was he trying to tell me? All he kept doing was moving back and forth whilst drawing an upside down triangle.

[Is that supposed to be La Pyramide Inversée?]^[1]

“___”

He shook his head in response, so I guess not.

The middle aged man seemed to understand that I found his actions incomprehensible, so he changed them up a bit.

His next course of action was to half open his mouth, raise both hands and slowly walk forward whilst making a sort of a zoned-out expression.

Oh, now that, I understand.

[So it's something to do with zombies?]

The man responded by giving me two thumbs up.

He then proceeded to alternate between his previous two patterns. That is, he'd start drawing triangles, switch to being a zombie, start drawing triangles again and so on and so forth. Hmmm... zombies, zombies... You know what I think of when I think of zombies? The freaking floating island we were on, that's what. Wait, is that what he's going for?

[Is that upside down triangle you're drawing supposed to be representing the floating island that one dungeon was on?]

“__”

Sweet, looks like I hit the nail on the head. He responded with another thumbs up.

[Alright, I get that part, what's next?]

The man took a lowered battled stance with his fists by his hips. He then began to tremble whilst giving off a magic-like glow, as if letting power course throughout the entirety of his body.

[Kaiouk*en?]

“__”

Yeahhhhh, I figured that wasn't it.

[Wait wait, are you trying to imitate Krill*n?]

“__”

Okay yeah, I figured that one wouldn't be right either. That said, I honestly couldn't really see his actions as anything other than him imitating a character straight out Dragon Ball or Huntsman X Huntsman.

I hoped he'd change his approach, but didn't and just kept repeating the exact same action.

[Hmm... are you trying to say something along the lines of someone using an incredible amount of power?]

He stuck out a hand so it pointed straight towards me before wobbling it from left to right, an obvious indication that I was kind of on the right track, but not really all the way there yet.

[Are you supposed to be... releasing some sort of secret trump card?]

He gave me a point and a nod, so apparently that was the right answer. Let's see... secret trump card... floating island dungeon...?

[Oh! Latent Potential Release!]

The man gave me an excited thumbs up since I'd finally manage to give him the answer he wanted. Immediately afterwards, he raised his hand to his face and started to flap his fingers as if to imitate a pair of lips.

Something about talking through latent potential release...?

[The lich?]

The man formed an X with his forearms.

[Let's see... what else fits... The system announcer?]

Wrong again, apparently.

[Oh, wait! I remember now! You must've been the one dude that started talking to me telepathically out of nowhere! I remember you telling me a bunch about the System Announcer.]

It seemed like I'd gotten the answer right? The man responded with a curt nod, but quickly transitioned into a light bow with his hands pressed together in what seemed like an apologetic manner.

He again started going back and forth between a pair of actions. He'd bow and then do the talking motion and then repeat the whole cycle ad infinitum.

Looked to me like he was trying to apologize with regards to something he'd said to me back then... Hmm... What did we talk about anyways...?

[Who are you anyway?]

[Wellll, I was planning on telling you eventually anyways. And I was planning on meeting up with you in about a monthish, something around that, iunno. Well, telepathically meet up that is, if you count that. Buuuuuut, eh, whatever. Might as well tell you now minus all the pretentious nitty gritty junk anyway.]

[You sure sound laid back...]

[Welll, that's cause we don't really count as strangers n stuff anyway. Whatever, whatever. Might as well say it. My name is...]

And that was when our conversation had come to an abrupt end. So if he wanted to apologize for something, it'd probably be because...

[I'm guessing we aren't able to meet up in person like you'd been planning?]

The man responded with a nod.

[I guess you must've run into some sort of blocker or something along the way then?]

A pair of nods.

[And you can't tell me who you are either?]

A group of three nods.

Ahhh, I get what this whole thing is all about... but why can't he talk this time? I mean, he did last time.

The man made the power up pose, pointed at himself, and then got on both knees and pretended to wheeze.

[So what I'm getting is that you can't talk anymore because I used Latent Potential Release?]

Apparently Latent Potential Release had affected this guy the same way it had with the System Announcer.

[Wait, so that means you're a part of me?]

Nod.

[Are you the guy whose voice I heard right when I reincarnated?]

Nod.

I knew it!

That said, learning this had given rise to a question that I simply couldn't ignore or set aside for later.

[So... Just who are you then?]

I couldn't resist asking him that. I was so curious about the answer that I'd almost felt as if it'd been eating away at me.

The man frowned and shook his head from side to side. It didn't like he was going to be able to answer me.

[Hmm... Are you going to up and vanish too, or are we going to be able to end up being able to meet with each other like this some time in the future as well?]

The man drew one large circle overhead and dotted it with six smaller ones. An easily understood answer.

[The thing you just drew would be the full moon and its six smaller counterparts, right?]

But why only then of all times? Actually, now that I think about it, Latent Potential Release aside, the only time I'd ever spoken to him was when I was first reincarnated exactly three months ago. In other words, the moons had been full back then too

[Can you only appear during the Lunar Banquet or something?]

Apparently I was right.

[So I'm guessing I'll see you again in three months time?]

The man smiled a shit eating grin whilst energetically raising both thumbs. For some odd reason, the action had seemed to cause him to start to fade away.

[Wait a second! I'm not done asking you stuff!]

My words prompted the man to once again take his apology pose before vanishing altogether. I guess he ran out of time.

The world around me underwent the same thing it had earlier; it faded out into black before going back to normal.

[Seems like I'm back in the kitchen.]

Everything was exactly as it had been just before I faded out. In fact, no time seemed to have passed whatsoever. It was like I'd been momentarily spirited away or something.

[I guess I won't be able to see him for another three months, but I'll definitely have a tonne of questions prepped for when I do.]

I wonder if he can hear me right now. I mean, he did claim to be a part of me after all.

CHAPTER 115

VISITORS

The date was April first.

We were greeted by a group of visitors not long after we got up and to work.

“Good morning Miss Fran. I found a few people to fill that salesperson job you mentioned.”

Colbert had brought with him a group of three female adventurers.

“Hello.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Sup”

None of the three seemed to make light of Fran despite her being a child. They all bowed as they greeted her in the manner an adventurer normally would when associating with an employer.

“These guys are all a part of The Scarlet Maidens, a D ranked party.”

General Information

Name: Judith
Age: 24
Race: Human
Job: Soldier
State: Normal
Status Level: 21/99
HP: 118
MP: 103
STR: 61
VIT: 55
AGI: 60
INT: 61

MGC: 41

DEX: 40

Skills

Flame Resistance: Lv 1

Crisis Detection: Lv 1

Sword Techniques: Lv 2

Sword Arts: Lv 4

Herculean Strength: Lv 1

Shield Arts: Lv 3

Commerce: Lv 2

Cooking: Lv 3

Vigour Manipulation

Titles

None

Equipment

Black Steel Shortsword

Spirit Tree Wood Buckler

Iron Ant's Helmet

Iron Ant's Leggings

Trap Spider's Cloak

Bracelet of Minor Poison Resist

General Information

Name: Maia

Age: 23

Race: Half Beastman (Red Dog Tribe)

Job: Scout

State: Normal

Status Level: 23/99

HP: 93

MP: 95

STR: 41

VIT: 51

AGI: 69

INT: 60

MGC: 34

DEX: 60

Skills

Flame Resistance: Lv 1
Bow Arts: Lv 3
Presence Detection: Lv 3
Negotiation: Lv 2
Shortsword Arts: Lv 2
Flexibility: Lv 2
Arithmetic: Lv 3
Cooking: Lv 3
Trap Disarm: Lv 2
Trap Sense: Lv 2

Titles

None

Equipment

Toxic Rat's Shortsword
Spirit Tree Wood Bow
Black Dogman's Leather Armour
Black Dogman's Cloak
Lesser Sub-dragon's Shoes
Bracelet of Enhanced Detection

General Information

Name: Lydia
Age: 19
Race: Human
Job: Mage
State: Normal
Status Level: 20/99
HP: 71
MP: 144
STR: 38
VIT: 33
AGI: 48
INT: 71
MGC: 70
DEX: 36

Skills

Flame resist: Lv 3
Staff Arts: Lv 1
Fire Magic: Lv 3
Arithmetic: Lv 4

Medicinal Herbology: Lv 3
Mixing: Lv 3
Magic Circle: Lv 3
God of Wisdom's Divine Protection
Magic Manipulation

Titles

None

Equipment

Spirit Tree Wood Staff
Magic Silkworm's Cloth Armour
Black Dogman's Cloak
Fang Boar's Shoes
Spirit Bear's Leather Magician's Hat
Bracelet of Lesser Paralysis Resistance

Adventurer ranks could be sorted into one of two types, individual ranks and party ranks. Fran ran solo, so she only had the first type, which as one could expect from its name, was solely based on her own abilities.

Party ranks, on the other hand, were based on the group's overall combat potential. D ranked parties, for example, mainly consisted of adventurers with individual ranks in the E to F range.

As with the case with individual ranks, party ranks were assigned by the guild. They'd look at each member's individual ranks alongside their functions and the party's overall balance before assigning the most appropriate letter grade.

The party is often ranked higher than the individual members within it, but that isn't necessarily always the case. An example of this would be the one Cruz guy we did that joint operation with back in Alessa. All three of his party's members were ranked C, but the party wasn't given promoted to B because they didn't exactly qualify for the next tier up. In other words, three fully fledged C ranked individuals were still considered weaker than a single B ranker.

Kladd, the spiky haired dude that led Dragon's Roar, was in a situation that was both a bit similar but also completely different at the same time. He and his party were both classified as E rank despite the latter having five members in total. His party was denied promotion for a multitude of different factors. The first was that the other four

members were all ranked F, and the second was that none of its members used anything but spears. Honestly, if that was all it was, then the guild probably wouldn't have minded ranking his party up, but there was also the whole thing about him having a bad attitude.

Normally, you'd think that someone that went solo would be stronger than a party given that they shared the same rank, but that often wasn't the case at all. Each member of a party had their own individual strengths. Putting those together alongside the element of teamwork could allow the party to have better performance than a single more powerful individual.

The Scarlet Maidens seemed like a pretty good party at first glance. They were pretty well balanced in the sense that they had both a vanguard and rearguard. Moreover, they apparently also had a pretty good reputation, so they, unlike Kladd were allowed to rank up to D.

One interesting factor was that all three of their members had skills that related to either math or business, which was honestly pretty rare amongst adventurers.

"I'm Judith, the party's leader."

A girl with long, blue hair approached Fran and extended her hand out for a shake.

"I have a decent amount of sales experience. My father was a peddler, and often took me with him to work during my childhood. I have both the cooking and commerce skills."

I see, so I guess that means it's possible to pick up a skill by watching someone else use it for an extended amount of time. She probably got her cooking skill because she'd go on journeys with said father. I didn't really see any reason not to hire her, especially given that she was both beautiful and polite.

"My name is Maia. I'm in charge of most of the party's chores."

The next person to speak was a redhead with a bob cut. The fact that she spoke at a relatively slow pace seemed to contradict the fact that her skills were mostly thief-like. Apparently, she took care of all the party's cooking and prep work. She'd even polish everyone's armour. Her skills more or less indicated that she was a veritable jack of all trades. She had Cooking, Negotiation, and even Arithmetic. She was also

fairly pretty, so I once again saw no reason not to hire her.

“Lydia.”

The last of the three girls seemed resemble Fran a bit. She was relatively young, wore a white robe, had black hair, and seemed not to change her expression when she spoke. The only thing that really differentiated her from Fran was the fact that her hair went all the way down to her waist. And of course there was also the fact that she wasn't nearly as cute as Fran was, but that was just a given.

One her skills really caught my eye. Magic Circle allowed her to engrave a spell onto a piece of paper or something for later activation, possibly in the form of a trap. It looked really interesting. I really wanted to get my hands on it.

“ .. ”

“ .. ”

Lydia and Fran stared each other down for a bit, but neither had even the slightest change of expression.

“ .. ”

The atmosphere ended up getting all awkward until Fran decided to give her head a bit of a tilt.

“...I lost!”

Lydia suddenly dropped onto all fours whilst hanging her head in shame.

“What the! What in the world are you doing, Lydia?”

Judith seemed to be surprised at her companion's sudden action.

“I lost. The whole expressionless personality I had going was just a facade, but her? She's the real deal.”

“I see...”

“If the rumours are true, then she’s got me completely outclassed. She’s already a master swordsman, and can apparently even use flame magic despite being younger than me.”

Huh... So they know that much about her? I guess she’s quite a bit more famous than I’d anticipated. Is that a good thing though...? I honestly can’t tell...

“I’m nothing but a downgrade. The only thing I have over her is the length of my hair.”

“Y-You’re taller than her too.”

“That’s something that’ll probably change the moment she goes through puberty.”

“B-But you have The God of Wisdom’s Divine Protection. That should at least let you stand out a bit, right?”

Divine protection from the God of Wisdom made it easier to level up skills related to the accumulation of knowledge, which, to adventurers, was pretty god damn useful.

The party’s leader was already working hard. She had to explain the skill to Fran whilst praising Lydia and helping her to her feet.

“I have to be able to use Arithmetic in order to draw magic circles, so I can help with anything involving math. I can’t cook, but I have the Mixing skill, so feel free to leave any compounding-related tasks to me!”

“A-Anyways, we’ll do our best if your willing to hire us.”

“We really will!”

They didn’t seem to be lying about doing their best, and they’ve even got Colbert backing them, so I’d say I don’t really have any reason to refuse.

We negotiated with them a bit before arriving a final fee of five thousand Golde per person plus free meals for all three days. I’d thought it was actually a bit on the low side, but they seemed to find it decent given that the job was pretty much completely devoid of danger. My sense of monetary value seemed to be a bit off given that Fran and I often dispatched magic beasts with ranks far higher than our own.

Moreover, they were actually more interested in the free food than they were the Golde. It seemed that the only reason they wanted the job in the first place was because of how much Colbert had hyped up my cooking, which in turn really made me wonder if all his acquaintances happened to be foodies or something like that. Oh well, either way, they're willing to put in the effort, so whatever works, I guess.

Colbert leered at the three girls with a look of envy.

"I-I know that all you don't need anymore salespeople, but do you have any other sort of vacancy?"

The tuna lover interjected with a bit of a nervous tone.

Hmm... let's see... I can't think of anything in particular...

"I'd really just like to help out, so you don't even need to pay me. A-As long as you cover my meals."

Okay, honestly, that was pretty worth. A B ranked adventurer was offering to help us for nothing but free meals as compensation. I didn't really see any reason not to keep him around just so he can handle whatever happens to pop up.

"Got it. Will hire. Responsible for handling all miscellaneous tasks."

"R-Really? Hell yeah!"

"We three also look forward to working for you!"

And so, we managed to get ourselves a group of three salesgirls alongside someone to handle pretty much everything else.

We were almost done all our preparations too.

I'd already long finished making everything; the dough and filling were all completely prepped and ready to go. All that was left for us was put it together by wrapping the latter in the former and frying it. It sounded like there was very little left to do, but the final steps were actually quite tiring and time consuming in and of themselves.

Fran literally had the attention span of a cat, so I pretty much ended up having to do it

all myself.

That said, she obviously wasn't just sitting around and wasting time until I finished. She and Urushi were actually in the midst of a bit of some indoor training. They couldn't actually mess everything up by going all out, so instead, they focused on manipulating their magical energies in order to draw a series of three dimensional images. The nature of the exercise made it look more like they were playing around than training, and honestly, knowing Fran, I'd say she probably wasn't even actually trying to train. She'd likely decided to do the exercise because she thought it was fun. Seeing the two of them like that almost made me feel the urge put out a few snacks for them or something.

[Huh?]

I was about to grab her some milk and cookies, but ended up stopping because I suddenly felt a bunch of people approach the building we were in. Fran and Urushi seemed to have felt it as well, as both stopped what they were doing and instead started to focus their attention on examining our surroundings.

[Looks like we've got ourselves a few guests.]

And uninvited ones, at that. There were actually two distinct parties. The first had several people in it. Its members had tried to hide themselves whilst surrounding the building and slowly sneaking closer and closer towards us. The other consisted only of a single person. Said single person was approaching the building in a much more natural manner.

"Detain them?"

[Hmm... I'd say we hold off a bit. We can't actually be sure that they're here to harm us.]

We've no idea what they're after. The party of one was approaching via the back door, so I decided to have Fran check what he was up to before making any moves?

I was thinking that he was going to do something suspicious, but he actually just ended up giving the door a knock.

"Who?"

Fran called out to the person whilst readying herself for whatever was to come.

“I know it’s a bit late, but I was hoping to ask a favour.”

“Favour?”

“Yes. I was hoping that you would be willing to hear me out about something.”

I was a bit curious as to what was going to happen, so I took a quick glance out the door’s peephole.

The dude standing outside looked like your typical textbook merchant. He didn’t even bear the slightest resemblance to the dirty sleazeball he really was. That is, appraising him informed me that he was a total scumbag.

His job was Swindler, and he had both the Intimidation and Falsehood skills. Yup, he was definitely as guilty as could be. He wasn’t all that strong or anything like that, but his skillset made it so that I’d probably end up saying yes if anyone was to ask me whether or not I found him difficult to deal with...

“What?”

“I would very much prefer if you let me inside.”

“Can’t tell me now?”

“I’d really like to discuss the topic at length if possible.”

I went over to the window and began peering outside as Fran continued to question the man. His supposed companions were hiding themselves within the night, but I managed to find them regardless. I had both presence detection and night vision, so I more or less saw them as clearly as I would’ve during the day.

The conclusion? They were pretty much all just small fry. Our enemies were comprised of a group of burglars alongside a single Lv 25 assassin.

In other words, our assailants were villains that the world would be better off without. I was more or less already completely sure of the fact that they wanted to attack us. In

fact, they were technically already in the process of doing so given that they were trying their best to surround the place. We could probably already claim self defense even if we jumped into the crowd and busted them all up before letting them actually try something. We didn't even need to keep them around seeing as how the swindler dude could probably tell us everything we wanted to know.

[We'd probably end up with a mess on our hands if we let him get away.]

And so, I decided to just casually start by getting rid of the people surrounding us.

[Fran, let him in so he can't get away. I'll dispose of all his companions in the meantime.]

"Nn. Got it."

"Thank you very much for your understanding!"

"Come in."

"Don't mind if I do."

Urushi circled around the swindler and blocked off the exit the moment after he stepped through it. The wolf was currently in his mini mode, so he didn't look nearly as intimidating. Even so, the swindler basically had no capacity for combat, so seeing the "dog" seemed to worry him a bit. Naturally, he didn't go as far as to react by changing his expression, but I did catch him throwing Urushi a quick sidelong glance.

"Hahaha, that's a cute little doggy you have there."

"Nn."

Fran promptly locked the door as she responded in order to pressure the swindler even further.

I, on the other hand left the building before he so much as had the chance to see me. I used Short Jump to instantly teleport behind the assassin. I then cast Silence, lopped his head off and shoved his corpse inside the dimensional storage. The whole thing had gone much more smoothly than I'd initially anticipated. He had Crisis Detection, so I figured he might be able to react to me, but I managed to dispose of him before

the skill even went off.

I picked up the pace and began to repeat my prior actions. I had to be quick about it. The burglars had presence detection, so they would eventually realize that their allies were being picked off.

However, in the end, weaklings were weakings. Four of six assailants died before any of them even noticed that something was off. The last two didn't seem to have the capacity to immediately figure out what to do, so they too soon fell to my blade.

After finishing them all off, I teleported back into the building. Specifically, I ended up choosing to go to where the storefront was in order to avoid being seen by the swindler.

“—is what I would like to procure.”

My timing turned out to be pretty good. The swindler had just so happened to start getting down to business to moment I went back inside.

“Potion box?”

“Yes. I would like to procure from you the potion box you picked up at the pirate's hideout.”

“What?”

“There's no point in feigning ignorance. I've already had the matter investigated. Would you mind selling it to me for ten thousand Golde?”

Oh come on dude. Aren't you being a little *too* stingy? There was over a million Golde's worth of stuff in there you know? And you're trying to get it for just ten thousand? Seriously? Come on...

I couldn't tell if he was looking down on her or just planning to get his hands on the thing through some sort of less than decent method.

Given that he had his subordinates surround the building, I'd say it was more likely than not the latter.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“As I said just a few moments earlier, I’ve already had the matter investigated, and so, there is no point feigning ignorance.”

“No idea what you’re talking about.”

“Sigh... how obstinate. Taking the offer would have been to your benefit.”

The atmosphere around the man suddenly changed from that of a merchant to a much more intimidating air as he activated his skill.

“Refuse to talk anymore. Leave.”

“I won’t be leaving without the potion box.”

He’s pretty much kicked Intimidation into full throttle. Any normal girl would’ve already been scared out of her wits by now.

“Already said don’t know what you’re talking about. Mentally deficient?”

“Don’t get cocky now, little girl... You’re just a D ranked adventurer. You won’t get away with just a few scratches if you dare disobey us.”

The man merchant like mask finally shattered in its entirety.

“That’s my line. Mere swindler. Shouldn’t be cocky.”

“I’ll make you regret those words, girl!”

The man turned towards the exit whilst making his declaration. He was probably going to go order his subordinates to attack, but it obviously wasn’t going to happen. The card he was trying to play was the one he’d thrown away the moment he entered the building.

“Growl.”

“Oi, what’re you trying to pull here?”

“No escaping. Won’t let you get away.”

“Did you really think that my subordinates would just sit there if I didn’t end up returning to them?”

“Will allow you to call them. Try it.”

“Very well then! Hey! It’s time for work you bastards!”

He shouted incredibly loudly. His subordinates definitely would’ve heard him had they still been alive. It went without saying that he assumed they were, so he ending up standing there for a few moments whilst awaiting their arrival.

He waited and waited, but not a single one responded to his calls.

“W-Why aren’t they...”

“Men outside dealt with. By Master.”

“Impossible! You had a companion!? That wasn’t in the reports at all!”

We then used lightning magic in order to paralyze the swindler before tying him up and getting ready to make him tell us everything we wanted to know. It’d normally be pretty difficult to actually get information out of anyone with the Falsehood skill, but I just so happened to have the ability to render it completely invalid through the Principle of Falsehood.

“What are you planning?”

“Information. From where?”

“Why would I t-zzaazzjhakjazyhuazza!”

Fran gave sent a weak electric shock running through the man’s body, which in turn caused him to scream and convulse for a few seconds. This time around, we’d decided to go with a mix of electricity and Fran’s bare hands because I didn’t really want to have the kitchen all covered with blood.

“Haa... Haa...”

“Will ask again. Information about me. From where?”

“How would I k- zjlkahkjdfhjksdhfjkzzzzz!”

Fran made the shock last a few seconds longer this time around. She once again repeated the question, whilst also grinding one of his hands into the ground with her feet.

It took about an hour to get him to crack, but we did manage to get the now haggard looking, teary eye man to divulge everything he knew. Unfortunately, the process that led us there ended up getting his tears and drool all over the floor. Yeahhhh, I'll probably have to clean that up later.

“To confirm. Working for alchemists?”

“Y-Yes ma'am.”

Long story short, he was hired by an alchemist that went by the name Zerais. Apparently, said alchemist was a rogue that'd been expelled from the guild as a result of some sort of violation. He was currently working on illegal research, and was being funded by some sort of outside sponsor.

The potion box we'd picked up was originally something that Zerais had ordered. It ended up getting lost in shipment as a result of the pirates we'd “become friends” a few days back. Zerais was desperately looking for the potions within said box because they were extremely difficult to obtain.

We asked the swindler about Zerais' precise location, but it turned out that he didn't know about it because he wasn't exactly what you'd call high up the chain. Someone else had ordered him to do this, and that was all. Luckily, we did at least manage to get him to tell us where one of his organisation's bases of operation was.

Turned out it was the place Urushi had followed the hoodlum back to.

Huh, what's up with that?

So the mansion or whatever was probably related to Barbra's lord in some way. In other words, the building and whoever owned it had their feet dipped in both the

world of stealing recipes from orphanages and the world of rogue alchemists Like, what the actual hell?

We're going to need a bit more info before we can actually figure everything out. I really wanted to just break into the building, but that was pretty risky given that the residence was more likely than not ultimately related to some sort of noble.

"T-That's everything I know! I swear it!"

"Nn."

"P-Please, just let me go..."

Yeah no. That's not happening.

I quickly put telekinesis to use and gave the man's neck a good old one eighty degree twist.

[Welp. Looks like this whole thing's just turned into one big ass troublesome mess.]

CHAPTER 116

KRANZEL'S THREE GREAT FESTIVALS

“To reiterate, the contest will begin at noon. All participants will be allowed to depart the guild at ten in the morning. You’ve two hours to find and push your cart to a location of choice anywhere within the portside, market, or residential areas. However, be warned that you will be dismissed if you attempt to use another individual’s property without prior consent. Please do not set up without first consulting all relevant individuals. Please also wait until noon to start selling your products. Anyone that starts selling their goods before noon will be instantly disqualified, so please make sure you abide by the competition’s rules.”^[1]

The second round’s participants immediately dispersed and began heading towards their respective destinations. We’d originally planned for Urushi to drag our stall along, but a bit of further consideration led us to realize that such an act would ultimately make us stand out, and not in a good way either. So instead, we ended up having our newly employed helper do it for us.

I have to say. Hiring Colbert? Really solid decision right there.

I know I made it sound like cart pushing was all he was good for, but that wasn’t the case at all. He’d actually given us a pretty decent suggestion, a suggestion that ultimately actualized itself in Fran and the salesgirls all wearing matching maid uniforms.

“The curry bread we had for dinner last night was absolutely delicious. However, I can’t say for sure if that alone will be able to carry us all the way through to the finals.”

Colbert commented as he gazed upon our surroundings.

Each and every shop seemed to have its own selection of beautiful clerks. Though, I guess I should’ve expected that to be the case from the very start. The fact that pretty girls led to more sales was a universal truth, a fundamental axiom that simply couldn’t be overturned regardless of what world one was in.

Cuteness simply wasn’t something that could be defended against, but you know what,

cute is justice, so whatever.

“Colbert and I have been thinking over how to optimize our sales, so don’t you worry Fran! You’ll be cruising right through the second round!”

“I’ll do my best too!”

“And I’ll use my charms to attract as many male customers as I can!”

Luckily, it looked like all three of our salesgirls were pretty much ready to go full steam ahead. They’d been quite shocked at how the curry bread and rice I fed them last night tasted, so telling them that I’d feed them even more extravagant meals if we made it into the finals seemed to have fueled them up all the way.

A large group of people started to tail us as we headed towards our final destination. At first, I’d assumed that they were up to no good, but they actually turned out to be customers. Apparently, following the stalls around and camping out around them till they opened was actually a thing.

The number of people trailing behind us gradually grew as we continued to move. Travelling around caused us to end up with about fifty followers, which apparently was actually a pretty low headcount. Some of the more popular participants had about two hundred odd people following them around already.

Crap. I think I might not have taken this whole thing as seriously as I should’ve.

“Lots of people.”

“Hahaha. They don’t call this one of Kranzel’s Three Great Festivals for nothing. The Spring Lunar Banquet features the King of Cooking, The Orison Rite, and the Minstrel’s Contest, amongst many other events, so it draws in folks from all across the land. In fact, I’d say you’ve yet to see anything but a drop in the bucket.”

“Three Great Festivals? Others are?”

Fran tilted her head as she questioned one of Colbert’s statements.

“The other two would be Ulmut’s Dungeon Fiesta and the Royal Capital’s New Year’s Festival.”

“Though, I don’t really think the New Year’s Festival isn’t actually too different from the Lunar Banquet hosted here in Barbra.”

Apparently the only real difference between the New Year’s Festival and the Lunar Banquet was the fact that the King would give an address each time the former was celebrated. Both contained an enactment of The Orison Rite, and both featured stalls lining the streets with food for purchase. It wasn’t all that difficult to for me to picture it. The Dungeon Fiesta, on the other hand, had led me draw nothing but a blank.

“The Dungeon Fiesta is a festival meant for adventurers so they can engage in blood splattering, flesh tearing, bone crushing practices.”

The hell? All I can really say at this point is that it sounds violent and barbaric as all hell.

“Lydia’s more or less hit the nail on the head there. The fiesta does tend to get a bit wild.”

“Types of activities?”

“Well, although it’s a fiesta in name, it’s actually something moreso along the lines of a martial arts tournament.”

“And it even takes place in Kranzel’s most adventurer-populated city, so you know it’s gotta be good.”

“They’ve got three different categories. The first is one for people under level twenty, and the second for parties of at least size three. The last category doesn’t have any restrictions on its potential participants.”

Huh, a martial arts tournament? That sounds fun. It’d be worth checking out even if we didn’t end up participating ourselves.

“Takes place when?”

“It happens at the end of April, so it’ll start in about a month or so. Just in case you were wondering, the festival is actually held in commemoration of the dungeon’s capture.”

Sweet, the timing more or less works perfectly for us too. Ulmut was going to end up being our next destination anyways.

The conversation we had with Colbert and the girls extended all the way until we reached the place in which we'd been planning to set up.

"Okay. It looks like we're here."

It'd come time to focus on the contest.

We'd already accrued a queue of about a hundred people, but much to my surprise, not a single one of them requested that we open shop before noon.

The place we'd ultimately chosen was the large square in which the Chef's Guild was situated. To be a bit more specific, we set up just in front of the giant clocktower that marked the square's most northern point. We figured that this was pretty much the best possible place. We could attract customers because it had heavy traffic, and there was actually even enough room for everyone to line up and stuff.

The moment we settled down was the moment we got to work. Fran immediately pulled a batch of curry bread out from within her dimensional storage box and put it on display. She then hung a sign declaring our prices, fired up the stove, and placed a large pot of oil atop it.

"That's an excellent choice as far as display and advertising goes. Did you think of it yourself, Miss Fran?"

"Master did."

"Ah, I should've expected as much from the Master. He sure does have quite the diverse set of skills."

The next thing Fran pulled out of storage caused our employees, or more specifically our salesgirls, to only elevate their praises.

"Wow! I've seen a few merchants carrying things like those, but never before have I ever seen any so large. They even looks like they're compatible with every single kind of coin. Were they something designed specifically for use at a stall?"

The items in question were a group of three wooden coin counters. They weren't really anything all that fancy or special, at least by my standards. All I did was use wood in order to reproduce something I remember seeing back in Japan, but apparently the girls thought them to be innovative. [2]

"Nn. Exactly."

"The magic sword girl's master sure does seem versatile."

"Nn. Master. Amazing."

Judith, was a merchant's daughter, so she was able to familiarize herself with the coin counter almost immediately.

In fact, it didn't look like any of our three salesgirls had any trouble learning to use the tool, which was good. Effectively employment of the coin counter would allow them to work much more efficiently than they would've been able to otherwise. In other words, the coin counters would facilitate that whole selling en masse strategy I had going.

We had everyone head off to the side for lunch after we finished setting up. We decided to eat a little bit earlier because we had no idea how busy things would be getting. There was a pretty decent change that we'd end up having to work nonstop for the next few hours.

"Now, lunch."

"You have no idea how long I've been awaiting this!"

"Same here. You could very well say that we only accepted this request for the food's sake."

"Don't forget about breakfast! It was absolutely splendid."

"Them egg salad sandwiches... Hnnnngg."

Apparently everyone really liked the egg salad sandwiches I'd randomly whipped up for breakfast, so I decided to stick to the whole sandwich theme for lunch too.

Specifically, I ended up having four different types: egg, roast pork, chicken teriyaki, and tuna fillet. ^[3]

“Swooo gooooooddd!!!”

“Hey! I saw that Lydia! Stop trying to hog everything! You too Fran!”

“Heh heh heh...”

“Survival of fittest.”

“I’ll be taking this then.”

“Oh come on! Not you too Maia!”

“Wow! This juice has got quite some flavour to it!”

Our so called picnic lunch ended devolving into something along the lines of a skirmish as all five people fumbled around to get their hands on as many sandwiches as they could. I figured that the fifty I made would be more than enough, but apparently I ended up being about as wrong as wrong could be. The sandwiches had almost seemed to perform a vanishing act; they all disappeared in a matter of moments. If anything, it kind of ended up looking like I didn’t make nearly enough to satisfy everyone present.

The salesgirls didn’t seem to be all that happy with each other, and they ended up in a bit of a squabble. Hopefully they’d be able to get back to normal by the time they had to get to work.

One thing to note was that the Chef’s Guild actually had a staff member watching over each establishment in order to ensure that no one cheated. That is, they would also be responsible for aggregating sales numbers and ensuring that everyone used the exact materials that they’d prepared before hand and nothing more. You’d be disqualified the moment you tried to bribe or trick one of the aforementioned staff spectators.

We figured that they’d end up pretty hungry and exhausted at the end of the day, so we tried offering them a few sandwiches, but they ultimately ended up refusing even those.

“I really have to say that the meal before is delicious, but I think the item we’re going to be selling are actually even better.”

“I know right? We’d actually considered buying ourselves some a few portions even though we just had lunch.”

Colbert and Lydia purposefully raised their voices so that the people spectating us could hear them. Apparently, it worked, as a few onlookers actually ended up running over and joining the line. Said queue was already well over a hundred people long. It looked like we were going to have one hell of a busy afternoon.

[1] I just realized I never explained this, but I've been using carts/stalls/booths interchangeably because they're like these mobile food stalls people pull out for festivals. Think the people who sell hot dogs in major cities.



[2] Think super bootleg cash registers.



[3] For some odd reason, Japanese people love taking dishes that typically go well with rice and shoving them between two pieces of bread. Now, note that they don't use the same white bread you'd typically find in the west, but rather something a bit more buttery and fluffy. If you have any Mitsuwa Marketplaces near you, you might be able to find JP sandwich bread at the bread stores often contained therewithin.

Tamagosando (Egg salad sandwich) is filled with a JP style egg salad. That is, it's basically made up of salt, pepper, sugar, and mayonnaise with a much greater focus on mayo than I'd consider healthy. Note that the mayo is specifically Japanese mayo. The difference between Japanese mayo and American mayo is that the former is typically sweeter and typically isn't made with egg whites.

The sandwiches themselves don't really contain anything but the egg salad, whereas

the western counterpart seems to include various condiments as well.



Yakibuta (roast pork) is literally Chinese Char Siu. I have yet to have any decent Char Siu in the USA, but I've had my fair share of it in Canada. Shout out to anyone in the Toronto area, cause it's super good there.



The sandwiches tend to contain eggs and vegis as well.



Chicken teriyaki sandwich... do I really need to explain this one? If you don't know what it is, feel free to comment, but at this point in time, I feel that Chicken Teriyaki is so widespread that basically everyone knows what it is.



The last type of sandwich they mentioned in this chapter was magurokatsusando, or tuna cutlet sandwiches if you don't speak moon rune. They take fish fillet and make it like they would tonkatsu before shoving between two pieces of bread. That is, they cover it in flour, eggs, and then Japanese breadcrumbs before deep frying it in a pan. Typically contains some vegetables, but there's like a billion recipes for this stuff because of how widespread it is.



CHAPTER 117

THE FIRST DAY'S END

“So just to confirm, three milds and two mediums. Is that right?”

“I’d like four hots!”

“Okay, that’ll come to a total of thirty Golde.”

Series upon series of different transactions continued to occur. It was already three in the afternoon, but we were still completely swamped with customers. The line leading up to our store never seemed to drop below a headcount of a hundred, and we had to use the dimensional storage to replenish our stock twice already.

The two non-salespeople, Fran and Colbert, were respectively responsible for frying up the food and ensuring that the line stayed organised.

“Each piece of curry bread will cost you ten Golde. The mild flavour is suitable for children and any other individuals unable to tolerate strong spices. The medium flavour is for those of you that enjoy that extra little kick. The spicy flavour is so incredibly hot that it’ll make you spit flames!”

Colbert told our customers more about our products as they stood in line, and in doing so, got them to think about their orders ahead of time. His efforts helped to ensure that everything at the cash register went smoothly as could be.

According to Judith, at least half our customers ended up arriving a decision before hitting the front of the line. Unfortunately, the statistic also meant that not everyone was able order the moment their turn came. Normally, you’d think that to be a bad thing, but apparently many of those people had only been convinced to come check out our goods because the line here was actually relatively short, which was a good thing seeing as how it meant we were able to steal customers from the competition.

“Purchasing our goods will serve to benefit your health! Our establishment uses the ever so scarce resource of magic-infused water in all our operations! Don’t miss this chance! Get your serving here and now before it’s all gone! I repeat, Recovery Water

is right at your fingertips!”

Apparently, magic-infused water was actually considered a luxury good amongst the general populace, so Colbert advertising our use of it actually managed to pull in quite a decent number of customers.

I would’ve loved for things to keep going as well as they had, but fate wasn’t exactly what you’d call kind.

“The fuck is this shit? You supposed to be sellin garbage?”

“Bitch, you call this bread? Looks like trash to me. The hell is wrong wit chu, chargin people for trash? Y’all fucked up and crazy.”

Our stall ended up getting approached by a group of mohawked dudes, their bodies adorned with unfantasy-like, metal-studded leather jackets.

Gross.

I could tell what was going on at a glance. They were obviously just an unruly bunch hired by one of our competitors. This was further evidenced by what I saw upon taking a quick peek at their stats. They were incredibly weak. I mean, I guess you could sic them on a normal person, or like the average chef or something because of how they looked, but they were honestly far too pathetic to do anything to an adventurer, let alone a whole group of them.

“Come on, hurry it up. Get the fuck outta here with yo dirty ass shitpile merchandise.”

“Yee, probably tastes like fucking garbage anyway. Shit’s so ugly that looking at is enough ta make me want ta vomit. Shieeeeet.”

“Hurry it up, get a move on. You know what, yer asses be slow as hell. We’ll fuckin move you ourselves!”

The disgustingly dressed men pulled out a series of club-like weapons as they approached, an action that immediately caused our customers to start screaming in panic.

However, they didn’t so much as manage the slightest act before they collapsed.

Fran was supposed to have been cooking, but she somehow managed to end up behind them. I didn't actually know when she first moved to strike them, but if I had to guess, I'd say it was probably right after they insulted curry bread.

All four men had been deprived of their ability to move; they'd been left paralyzed by a series of electric shocks.

I wanted to get right back to selling stuff, but I also kind of wanted to try getting some information out of them too.

[You can leave the follow up to me and just focus on getting back to work, Fran.]

(Nn. Got it.)

[Urushi, go grab one of them.]

"Woof."

I used Stone Wall to make sure no one could see what I was going to do to the man Urushi dragged away. I then took the additional precaution of casting Silence as to ensure that his screams wouldn't be heard by anyone outside the enclosure.

[We'd better get this done quick. Colbert's already called the guards over.]

I immediately made a doppelganger and smacked the man across the face a few times in order to wake him up.

"Huh?"

Smack

"Argghh!"

"Heal."

I punched the man right in the nose the moment he opened his eyes before fixing him right back up without so much as the slightest pause.

“Wha—”

Crack

“Grarrgh!!”

“Heal.”

I then repeated the process, but this time, I broke his legs instead of punching him.

And so the cycle continued. I hit him, and healed him, only to hit him and heal him some more. All in all, I had to do it about ten times before finally terrifying him to the point where he’d start screaming with his face twisted in fear the moment I even so much as moved a muscle.

Sweet. That should be enough to make him talk.

“I’ll stop doing this to you if you tell me what I want to know.”

“I-I’ll tell you everything! I’ll talk, so please, no more! Please!”

Everything from that point onward went just as smoothly as I’d hoped. The man answered all my questions without so much as even the slightest trace of a lie.

His group was nothing but a bunch of petty hoodlums. They didn’t have the spirit required for adventuring, nor the courage needed to step onto the battlefield as a mercenary. All their income came from them harassing the townsfolk.

Just last night, they were hired by a man whose identity they knew little of. They didn’t bother finding out either. All they really cared about was that the man had paid a generous ten thousand Golde per person. The task bestowed upon them was to harass and destroy a pair of stalls. Their group was normally a group of eight, but today, they’d split in two halves in order to more efficiently complete said task. The other stall they were asked to attack turned out to be the one run by the orphanage.

I tried prying so I could find out a bit more about that mysterious employer of theirs, but it turned out that the man I’d captured really didn’t know much, as he pretty much ended up getting treated like a disposable pawn. Oh well, time to hand him over to the guards, I guess.

“Oi, you.”

“Y-Yes?”

“I’m going to be handing you over to the guards now. Answer every question they ask you.”

“Y-Yessir.”

“But don’t even make the slightest mention of me. The moment you talk about me is the moment you’ll die.”

I poured magical energy into my fingers, causing them to emit light as I pressed them onto the man’s forehead.

“W-What’re you...”

“I cursed you. I’ll know the moment you tell anyone even the slightest thing about me.”

“I won’t tell anyone anything! I swear it! I swear I won’t!”

I didn’t *actually* do anything to him, the whole thing was just a bit bluff, a facade. It looked like he totally fell for it though.

“I’d say that doing your best to reform and becoming a functioning member of society would probably be to your benefit. Not even I know what I’ll do if you’re still the same scum you are now next time we meet.”

“I-I’ll definitely do my best! I swear I’ll never do anything bad again! Pl-Please, don’t kill me sir! I beg of you!”

And so, I let the man regroup with his companions so they could all be arrested and shipped off to wherever they were being taken together. Colbert seemed to make a bit of a skeptical expression because he noticed that one man was absolutely terrified, but luckily, he didn’t ended up making anything of it.

[Looks like the orphanage is in trouble.]

(Master, go.)

[You sure?]

(Nn. I can't leave.)

Fran was responsible for everything that happened here because she'd registered for me by proxy. Hence, she was obligated to stay with the stall and upserve it all the way through to the end. The Chef's Guild's staff was still watching her every move, so she couldn't just up and leave without suffering the consequences.

[Alright then, I guess I'll just take Urushi with me and go.]

"Woof!"

(Leave stall to me.)

[Sure thing. Alright, let's go Urushi!]

"Bork bork!"

Urushi transported me inside of his shadow as we began to move.

Being a sword, or rather, an inorganic, made life pretty convenient at times like this. Since I didn't actually count as a real living thing, I could totally be treated like any other item and stored and stuff. Interestingly enough though, I could actually see the outside world from inside of Urushi's shadow.

The wolf dashed through the city at full speed whilst simultaneously doing his best not to stand out. The guards had started chasing us on more than one occasion, but, they were far too slow to keep up with Urushi's ridiculously high speed. Moreover, Urushi had a mark that proved he was Fran's familiar. Said mark made everything a whole lot less of a pain in the ass. That said, we still couldn't help but end up scaring a few children here and there along the way, but the most we could do was give them a mental apology seeing as the circumstances were what they were.

[I see it.]

"Woof."

The orphanage stall was about as crowded as crowded could be, but despite that, it's queue was incredibly well organised. Their customers managed to form a line about three hundred heads long without any sort of fuss. Holy crap.

"Woof woof."

"Look! It's Urushi!"

"Urushi!!!"

"Hey Urushi, what're you doing here?"

The orphanage children immediately recognized Urushi and ran towards him. Wait, aren't they supposed to be helping out or something?

I'd assumed they would be, but turning my gaze towards the stall allowed me to understand that there wasn't any issue. The kids that ran over to us were the younger, livelier ones, whereas the ones helping out were the slightly older and more responsible ones.

Urushi seemed quite happy with the fact that the orphanage's children had swarmed him in order to pet him, as most people ended up freezing up in fear the moment they saw him. The kids' attitudes stemmed from the fact Fran and saved the orphanage. They thought of Urushi as her pet, and thus, viewed him in a rather favourable light.

Nothing's seemed to have happened just yet, so I figured there wasn't harm in sitting around and letting Urushi enjoy himself a bit longer.

Unfortunately though, my thoughts almost seemed to have jinxed the whole damn thing, as the peace was broken the moment after the idea crossed my mind.

"The fuck!? You fucking expect us to pay for *this*!? You been smokin some hot shit dawg, this shit soup ain't got nothing but bushweed in it."

"I-I'm terribly sorry..."

"Bitch, you think I'm going to just forgive yo dumb ass just 'cause you apologizin? Hell naw. You want me to forgive you? Close this shack ass stall down right the fuck now!"

“T-That’s...”

“You talkin back to me bitch?”

“I...”

A sense of deja vu assaulted me as I watched a group of unfashionable men harass Io and the children working by her side.

“P-Please forgive us.”

“I-I’m scared!!”

“Wahhhh!”

A few of the children began screaming and crying in response to the thugs’ intimidation.

“Shut cho ass up!”

“Get on all fours and beg! Do it, bitch!”

Okay, yeah, the men were definitely taking it too far. Io had long gone pale in the face.

[Get’em boy.]

“Grrrrrrr”

“The fuck’s wrong with this mangy mutt?”

“The hell you looking at? I’ll kill yo as-argghghhghg!”

Urushi tackled one of the men. His body flew well over ten meters and landed with a crack as he transitioned into an unmoving lump.

The same soon happened to the other three. Each of the men flew through the streets like a bullet before collapsing.

“Woof!”

“Yay! You did it!”

“You’re so cool, Urushi!!”

“Woof woof!”

Urushi then proceeded to grab the men one by one and pile them all up in a single spot, after which he vaulted on top of them and howled as if to declare victory. This action led the children around him to cheer with even greater ferocity. Luckily, it looked like they didn’t end up traumatized as a result of the thugs’ actions.

The whole event came to a conclusion when a few guards came over and took the ruffians we beat down into custody.

I’m glad we managed to show up when we did. The orphanage would’ve ended up in a pretty bad spot otherwise. Whoever was responsible for this was one hell of a conniving cunt.

[That’s that taken care of, so let’s lead back.]

“Woof.”

I mean, there was no way there was going to be more than one set of thugs attacking each place in a single day anyways.

The day passed as per my expectations. Everything from that one point onwards went as smoothly as could be, and we ended without any other disturbances.

Every single participant was obligated to return to the Chef’s Guild at the day’s end in order to temporarily hand over their stalls. There, we learned that similar things had happened to a few other participants as well. Specifically, the orphanage aside, there were two that’d suffered from similar circumstances: The Dragon’s Table and The Noble’s Dish.

“Any problems?”

“None. The Dragon’s Table’s shopkeeper used to be an A ranked adventurer before retiring.”

“Strong?”

“He’s still more than strong enough to handle a few petty criminals. They say he used to hunt Dragons so he could use their meat in his dishes back in the day.”

Huh, a former A rank dragon slayer? That’s pretty interesting. He just so happened to be talking with one of the guild’s clerks, so I decided to give him a quick once over in order to check out his stats.

[Woah, he’s 60? Holy crap!]

He honestly looked to me like he was in his mid 40’s. Moreover, he was still pretty strong. Retirement had caused his skills and stats to weaken to the point where he was statistically inferior to Colbert. However, if you were to compare the two, I’d say with confidence that the former would be much more difficult to defeat than the latter.

I could tell at a glance that he was experienced in battle. The craftyness derived from his knowledge base would be far more troublesome an asset than sheer numbers.

I then turned towards and observed the guy who appeared to be in charge of The Noble’s Dish. He was followed by a series of cronies, and gave off an attitude that seemed to stress self-importance over all. Apparently, he himself was the Lord’s third son, and was currently acting as a chef under his older brother’s, the second son’s employ.

Honestly, he seemed pretty damn weak. How the hell did he manage to drive his assailants away?

“I heard that he prostrated himself before telling them that he didn’t care what they did to him. However, he begged and begged for them to at least overlook his customers. The thugs ended up losing interest and leaving shortly after.”

Huh... That might end up making The Noble’s Dish quite a bit more popular than they were before.

Thankfully, none of the four shops attacked actually ended up suffering any losses. However, that wasn’t to say that everything was already done and over with; we’d have to be cautious going forward as well.

What a pain in the ass...

I'd like to prevent anything from happening to the orphanage if possible. Hopefully, they'd be able to fend for themselves. I did hear that some of their alumni were going to start guarding them as of tomorrow. Said alumni had ended up becoming adventurers after gaining their independence, so they *should* be okay.

Either way, the first day had now come to an end. We'd already returned our cart and parted ways with Colbert and the three salesgirls. We ended up selling a whole seven thousand servings, much more than I'd initially expected. I was going to have to work hard tonight so I could replenish our stocks.

I started thinking back on the day's events as I worked. It was pretty obvious that whole reason we ended up getting assaulted was because one of the twenty participants was trying to get rid of as many of their competitors as possible. That said, there were far more than just twenty suspects, seeing as how almost everyone had sponsors and backers and whatnot. The only four people I could possibly exclude from the list of suspects would be the victims themselves.

Wait... hold on a second. Why did The Noble's Dish manage to get away with nothing more than a few moments worth of prostration? The orphanage was about to have their stall completely torn down in spite of their apologies.

Yeah, this totally feels like a set-up.

It's possible that the thugs ended up deciding not to mess with The Nobel's Dish because the guy running the place was the local Lord's son, but I doubt it. There had to be more to it than just that.

It'd probably be good for us to keep an eye on them for the time being.

[Urushi.]

"Woof."

[Do you still remember how the Lord's third son smelled?]

"Bork."

[Alright, can you do me a favour and keep an eye on him and check what he's up to?]

“Woof!”

I had to stay here and keep making curry bread. Fran was still growing, so she couldn't afford to stay up. Moreover, she's going to be responsible for protecting the stall tomorrow too, so she's going to need all the energy she can get. In other words, Urushi was the only one left available for the job.

[I'm counting on you, boy!]

CHAPTER 118

THE SECOND DAY

Fran and I started getting everything ready for tomorrow after seeing Urushi on his way.

I was originally planning on saving the spicy kind so I could introduce it on the second day, but all the stress had gotten to me, and I accidentally ended up having them sold alongside our other two flavours. In other words, I'd have to introduce a brand new flavour in order to make sure everything went according to plan.

"Master. Thought up new curry dish."

[Oh? Sounds interesting. What kind?]

"Combination of Master's best dishes. Curry sushi."

[Not bad. The name's got a good weight to it.]

I can't really speak for the taste though. The combination seemed so odd that I couldn't even fathom it. Moreover was the fact that the concept itself didn't really seem all that applicable to curry bread in particular.

But that aside, I did have a pretty good idea myself.

What I needed to make was a super spice that transcended the realm of super spices, a super spice that went even further beyond. Naturally, a flavour as potent as that would need itself a pretty solid name. I'd considered a few things like Death Spice and Ogre Spice, but I ultimately ended up going with Dragon Spice. Dragons were considered the world's most powerful creatures, and the whole idea was that the spice was the same. I was thinking of giving it a dragon themed slogan too. I could totally see it selling if we said that "eating it'll make you breathe fire, just like a dragon!"

The Dragon Spice Curry Bread had a bit of alteration put into three different parts of its cooking process. First was the filling. Most of my other curries had been made Japanese style. They'd also only used a single type of meat. The Dragon Spice, on the

other hand, was a pork and beef curry that moreso followed the Indian Qeema style. The dough I was using for its breadding had a bit of black spice mixed into it, and as a result, shone with a much darker lustre. The final change was the manner in which it was deep fried; I mixed quite a bit of lard into the oil so I could fully draw out the curry's taste. [1]

I then came up with an iteration of our mildest flavour. The idea was to remove a bit of spice, add some cheese and ultimately craft a batch of Cheese Curry Bread. [2]

Furthermore, I'd improve the recipe even further by grabbing all the bread crumbs I'd gotten from the whole frying processes I'd done over the past few days. The point was to rub them into the Cheese Curry Bread's dough. I figured children would enjoy the texture more that way.

I couldn't make all that many of either of the two new variations, but I estimated that I should be able to ramp production up enough to get us at least a solid two thousand of each. Besides, the idea was to call these products limited edition anyways. We'd them at twenty Golde a piece, with a limit on four of each type per customer. I was almost completely sure that our strategy would cause them to sell. The urge to collect the scarce was something that would have an effect on people regardless of what world they resided in.

"As expected of Master."

[I'll work on the two new products I just introduced. Fran, you focus on deep frying the stuff that's already been prepped.]

"Nn."

The two additional types we'd come up with ended up leaving us with a total of five different product variations.

With that in mind, the two of us silently worked until the clock struck midnight. It was only then that I finally finished getting a large batch of curry bread ready to be deep fried.

[Whew. That's half done.]

"Good work."

[Thanks. Wait, what's that?]

Fran had finished with all the frying she'd been assigned a bit earlier, so she'd moved on to cooking up a little something in a pot.

"Curry sushi. Complete."

Fran would normally mind how tedious the work was, but today all her reluctance had been thoroughly suppressed by her curiosity. The pot beside her looked like something along the lines of curry. She'd swapped one of the ingredients out for a fishy stock, and caused the pot's contents to more so resemble a soup than a curry. Beside said batch of soup-like curry was a few pieces of the tuna sushi we'd made back on the ship.

"Put sauce on sushi. Eat."

[I see.]

Fran immediately began pressuring me into consuming her creation.

"Try?"

[S-Sure...]

I'll admit the dish was a bit weird and off putting. However, Fran was its creator, and thus, I had absolutely no choice but to eat it. Period. Full stop.

Thus, I made a doppelganger, grabbed a piece of sushi and dipped it right into the pot of curry. Again, I couldn't help but note that it didn't look delicious. Seeing a piece of tuna smothered in yellow sauce did nothing but curb my appetite.

But that didn't matter! There was no way any real man could possibly back off from a situation like this one!

"Here goes."

"Nn."

Nom nom nom...

Huh? That's weird. It doesn't taste bad at all. In fact, I'd say it was pretty good. For some odd reason, the curry's spices actually managed to draw out the Tuna's flavour. The vinegared sushi rice actually seemed to work decently well with the whole combination too.

Or actually, I guess this does make sense. Fran's cooking is maxed out, and she's even got a title for it. She would actually be even better than I am at it should she give it her all. Needless to say, the making of this dish had caused her to do exactly that.

Unfortunately, I still don't really think that the whole thing she's got going here is something we can actually apply to curry bread, but, she seemed satisfied with the result, so all was good. After confirming my approval, she polished off the rest of the sushi before heading back to the inn with her spirits high.

I, on the other hand, had no choice to get back to work. That said, I'd just managed to get myself a portion of Fran's cooking, something that was pretty much of legendary rarity. Hence, I was as pumped as could be, and ready to fry all night.

The first thing we did the next day was submit a few documents to the cooking guild so that we could get our new merch approved. We'd written all ingredients in the documents we handed over, so they ended up giving us an immediate thumbs up after giving the products a quick sample.

Our second day went much better than our first. News about our products had spread through word of mouth overnight. As a result, we ended up being permanently stuck with a line about two hundred heads long. Our two new additions were doing just as well as anticipated, and as I'd expected, the cheese type was especially popular amongst children.

Moreover was the fact that we'd yet to experience any sort of trouble.

Speaking of trouble, The Noble's Dish had managed to benefit from it greatly. Rumours of their "benevolence" had spread throughout the town, and as a result, they ended up being much more popular than they'd been the day before. I heard that they'd also hired a few adventurers as guards as a result of yesterday's occurrences.

I thought it to be odd, so I ended up appraising the people going around spreading the

aforementioned rumours.

...

Are you kidding me!? Each and every single one of the rumour spreaders was a goddamn hoodlum; they all had level one intimidation. There was no way in hell people like *them* would go out of their way just to sing someone praise.

This be suspicious as all hell. Urushi'll probably be able to fill us in on a few more details once he gets back. I'd very much prefer if nothing happened, but having information just in case would be pretty handy.

And again, I jinxed it. The moment the thought crossed my mind was the moment something happened. It looked like someone had tried to bud into the line, and thus, he ended up arguing with a few of the other customers.

Fran and Colbert quickly rushed over in order to resolve the situation. However, it seemed to resolve itself before they got there. One of the people in line had been an adventurer. Said adventurer had quickly pinned down the man that'd tried to bud.

Something about the unruly man felt a bit off. He continued to shout what sounded like nonsense despite having been thoroughly physically repressed. It almost seemed as if the guy had been high as a kite.

Appraising him returned the result that he was suffering from an abnormal status condition. Specifically, he was afflicted with the "Agitated Heart of Evil." The heck was that supposed to be? Is it any different from just being a bad person?

We immediately cast Refresh and returned the man's mental state to its usual demeanor. He didn't lash out or anything like that again thereafter.

"Thanks for watching over him and waiting till we got here."

"No problem. Thanks for all your the work you put into keeping the peace."

"Alright, you. Stand up and walk. Man, I can't believe how many people have been acting up like this today. It feels like I've been escorting rowdy festival goers all day."

Was the guy just one of many rampaging drunks or something? I mean, the people

back in Japan would end up getting pretty unruly during festivals too. They'd often end up brawling and committing petty thievery and whatnot. The phenomenon was described as falling to the devil's temptations, and I didn't see any reason for it not to occur here in this world as well.

There were only two interesting things that happened after the man's initial onslaught. The first was us getting harassed by yet another one of his kind. The second was when a bunch of dudes with serious looking expressions joined the line. I mean, they hadn't really tried to bother the other customers or anything like that, so I figured that they were just adventurers or mercenaries. The only issue was that they were so overly grim that seeing them ended up making everyone else feel a bit unsettled. They weren't really our only set of weird customers, and it wasn't like we could send them away just cause their faces looked a bit intimidating at a glance.

It turned out that the reason they'd come was because they'd heard rumours of our Dragon Spice variation. The adventurers had started talking about it, and it'd become a widespread claim that only a true man could appreciate its flavour. Thus, many adventurers had ended up coming over to the stall in order to undergo a sort of trial.

"It appears that I *may* have exaggerated a bit too much."

God damn it Colbert, this was your fault!?

Apparently, he'd claimed to have passed out as a result of its intense taste, and thus, spurred on all our make a man out of you type guests.

Yeah, we ultimately decided to end up just pretending they were regular people. They certainly were standing out, but they didn't cause any harm, and even served to function as deterrents for any potential aggressors, so yeah. Why not, right?

In other words, the number of real problems we ended up running into before finally making our way back to the Chef's Guild was two.

I immediately looked towards the Lord's third son upon our arrival. He was surrounded by his cronies as usual, but Urushi was far out of sight. My guess was that the wolf was observing from a bit further away.

"It looks like we did pretty well today~"

“Victory is within our grasp.”

The noble had come to the guild with more than just his staff members. He'd also brought along some guards, and even the merchant responsible for replenishing his stocks. He even had a few additional noble-like people with him this time, which I figured was pretty much natural seeing as how he was the son of a Lord. They were all really haughty and cocky looking. There was no way in hell anyone like them would ever prostrate before a mere commoner, even if said commoner was a customer.

I wanted to observe the group for faults, but was ultimately interrupted as someone approached Fran and started up a conversation with her.

“Good evening.”

“Nn. Evening.”

“I am The Dragon's Table's owner. The name is Fermus.”

The man who named himself Fermus had wavy long hair, and a pair of thin, wide eyes. He stood at about a hundred and eighty centimeters tall. Despite the fact that he was fully clothed, I could tell at a glance that his entire body was constructed of steel-like muscle; his long limbs were built as could be.

His face was decorated with a gentle smile, one that I was sure had taken the hearts of many a woman captive. Even the man's wrinkles seemed to add to his charm. He seriously didn't look his age. I couldn't shake the impression that he just had to be in his mid forties.

I did as I had yesterday and once again gave him a quick scan, and verified once more than the numbers I'd seen were correct. He really was sixty, and a pure blooded human at that. The hell sort of anti-aging cream was he using!?

“Nn. Fran.”

“You see, I have recently had the opportunity to sample your shop's curry bread.”

Oh? Is he trying to pick a fight, or...?

“I have to say, eating it really inflicted me with quite a bit of emotion. Tasting

something so unique left me feeling moved, its flavour was one I'd never before even imagined. I believe they say that it was your master that constructed the dish?"

"Nn. Master's creation."

"And a wonderful creation it is. Please relay to your master that I was incredibly impressed with his work."

Being praised by a chef as accomplished as the man standing before me gave me a rush of dopamine.

[Do me a favour and tell him that I'm delighted to hear his words.]

"Nn. Master happy."

"Please do stop by my store with your master sometime. That concludes my business, so I shall be taking my leave for now. I do hope to see you there."

Fermus did as he said and left immediately afterwards. His actions were mirrored by a few other chefs, they each approached us in turn in order to sing praises of how unique and delicious our product was. I couldn't help but feel the urge to smile. Each and every single one of them was offering honest praise.

That, however, was soon interrupted as the Lord's third son approached us. All the other chefs backed away the moment they saw him start to move in our direction.

"Ugh, I don't like that guy."

"All of his profits come from his connections."

"He definitely goes out of his way to make himself look good too."

"The guy has a lot of rumours about him, so be careful, alright?"

The chefs immediately began bad mouthing him as they took their distances. Looked like he wasn't what you'd call liked.

"The name's Waint. I hail from The Noble Dish, and like the others, I have also recently had the opportunity to sample Curry Bread."

“Nn.”

“It was quite the wonderful dish. It had a novel taste to it, and contained within it a series of vivid flavours.”

“Nn.”

“I wish us both luck in this competition going forward.”

Pretty much everything that came out of his mouth had been a lie. Moreover, the guy totally started wiping his hands off after exchanging handshakes with Fran.

“What an extraneous amount of effort that must have taken. I never would have expected you to not only be obligated to exchange handshakes with, but also compliment a filthy beastman.”

“Fret not. It’s not too hard a task to complete if you think it an act done in good humour.”

These sons of bitches start shit-talking the moment they thought they were out of earshot! You know what? Fine. If you think your hand’s all that dirty, I’ll solve your little problem by cutting it the hell off. That way, you’ll never have to deal with having a dirty hand again.

Shit! Where the hell is Urushi? He’s probably got some sort of evidence by now. I swear I’m going to use whatever he found to shove that piece of shit convicted of literally everything at the very first possible opportunity!

I can’t do anything for now, but polish that head of yours, you piece of shit! Cause I’m making a trophy out of it!

We, or rather, I headed back to the kitchen we rented out with my mood as sour as could be. Unlike me, Fran didn’t really seem to care. She was rather neutral about the whole thing.

“Master.”

[Yeah, I know.]

Fran was on guard, she looked at the restaurant we'd borrowed with her senses turned up to max. Likewise, I toned down my anger and began focusing on the much more important task of observing our surroundings.

We sensed several people within the former restaurant premises despite that fact that we were the only ones that should've had access. This time around, our guests really were completely uninvited; they were trespassing on our properties whilst we were away. I wanted to just get in there and slaughter them all, but we didn't own the place, so I didn't feel right busting it up or getting blood stains all over its woodwork.

[Let's sneak up on them and incapacitate them for now.]

"Got it."

We thinned out our presences and silently approached the kitchen door. We sensed four intruders in total. Two were in the storefront part of the building, and the other two in the kitchen part.

Our first move was to cast Silence and stick the key into the door. Strangely enough, the lock was still in the same state it'd been in the morning when we left. Did they break in from the storefront side? Oh well, no point thinking about now. We'll just beat it out of them later.

We ever so slightly opened the door just enough so that we could see into the building. None of the intruders looked to be in plain sight, they were hiding.

Were they trying to ambush us? Yeah, that's not really going to work, not on us at least.

[I'll get the one on the right. You get the one on the left.]

(Nn.)

I rushed into the room whilst expanding Silence's range to cover its entirety. I then immediately struck the man hiding behind the door frame with a bolt of lightning and caused him to pass out with his lips flapping wildly.

Likewise, Fran had also paralyzed her target with the magic equivalent of a taser. We then promptly had both restrained before moving onto their companions.

The other two invaders met a similar set of fates. All four were actually decently strong. Even the weakest of them was at least level twenty. They probably would've been able to beat Fran if she was just any other D ranked adventurer. Did they not learn from what happened last time? Wait, were these people even connected to the other group that attacked us?

We lined up the four assailants and began our usual interrogation processes. To be specific, we started with the highest level dude, the one that looked most leaderlike.

"Awake?"

"W-What in the... Untie me!"

"Might. Depends on answers. Here, why?"

"The hell? Like I know! You think you can get away with this, girl!?"

And so, ten odd minutes passed.

All four men were now sitting with their legs tucked underneath their thighs and their butts on their heels. A single glance at their faces revealed that they were now but shadows of their former selves. What a wonderful sight. [3]

"Summary. Attacked me to stop participation in King of Cooking?"

"Y-Yes Ma'am."

Weren't we getting attacked a bit *too* often? Like, could they cut it out already? It isn't even threatening, it's just annoying.

Asking about the person behind all of this ended up providing us with a name that we'd yet to know.

"Man behind this. Named Rynford?"

"Yes ma'am."

Apparently this Rynford guy was some old man staying alongside a few subordinates

at the manor we identified a few days back. The men here were hired by said Rynford.

So why was Rynford they trying to mess with us anyways? Was he trying to back up the Lord's third son and increase his chances at winning? Or was it maybe something related to the whole alchemist thing that was going on a few days back? Or maybe this Rynford guy worked for the alchemist? But if that's the case, then why try to stop us of all people?

We need more information. At this rate though, it really seemed that we might have to end up raiding the manor after all...

[Looks like we're stuck waiting for Urushi.]

"Nn."

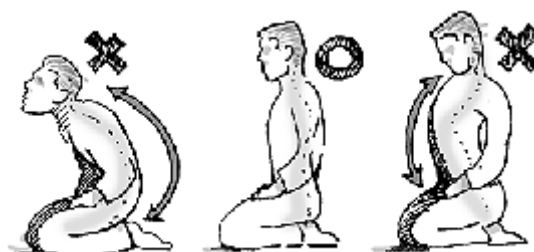
[1] Qeema aka Keema is an Indian dish that gained popularity in Japan. While the Indians do still retain their traditional recipes for it, the Japanese variant has naturally been adapted to better suit their tastes.



[2] Cheese curry bread is literally exactly what it sounds like. It's curry bread, but with cheese. The flavour is often adjusted so it's a bit less spicy.



[3] This means they're sitting in seiza, a traditional Japanese posture often used for repentance and discipline. Sitting in it for a long time kinda hurts.



CHAPTER 119

SIDE: BLUKE

“What!? What in God’s name is going on!?”

Why won’t everything bend to my wishes!? Barbra is nothing short of a metropolis, and I, Bluke Krysten, am its Lord’s second son. By that logic, the very city should bend to my will!

“Zerais! Did you not claim that the city would be thrown astir? Explain yourself!”

I glared upon the petite man standing before me. He appeared thin and unhealthy as ever, but he more than had his uses.

His name was as I’d shouted moments before. He was former disciple to the Adventurer’s Guild’s famed Eugene, and also the reason for which the great alchemist was expunged from his companions’ circle. The same fate had naturally befallen Zerais, and hence, he’d fallen into the grasp of Barbra’s underground. His current tasks mainly involved participation in the illegal.

Frankly, he was a madman. His research involved infusing magic crystals into human flesh, all in the name of creating members of the demon race. Truly, a realm of research from which even the Gods themselves would veer. However, the man was quite competent in spite of his lunacy, and as a result, he and I had experienced together.

The potions and poisons he produced truly put their value on display in my times of need. They would allow me to overturn a woman’s decision should she reject the offer to be made into one of my concubines. More importantly, they could even be used to silence the commoners that wished to prattle to my father of my misdeeds.

Our association has granted me the ability to prosper, and it is through him that I was able to obtain my current position.

“Oh, that. Looks to me like someone’s been getting in our way.”

“I demand more details.”

Had my plans been exposed...?

“Are you familiar with the name “The Black Tail?””

“I haven’t the slightest clue.”

If I were to guess, I would likely assume it to be some sort of restaurant. I fail to see how a mere restaurant would have any sort of association with my goals. ^[1]

“The Black Tail is one of the participants in this year’s King of Cooking.”

“And what of it? I see no correlation.”

“The stall I mentioned earlier is making use of magic-infused water in its products. Specifically, it’s using the Water of Recovery, which dispels the effects of any abnormal status conditions cast on the consumer within the past few days.”

“Really now ? ”

I doubt that a mere street stall would have the capacity to mass produce magic-infused water.

“It’s true. I had one of my subordinates get his hands on one of their products. Their items have recovery-based properties.”

“Tsk. In other words, they are ruining our plans then?”

“Yeah, especially seeing as how they’re selling their products for just ten Golde apiece.”

“So they’ve essentially flooded the markets?”

“I’m pretty sure they’ve been selling at least five thousand units a day.”

“There’s a fair chance that most of The Noble Dish’s customers will have ingested their products as well.”

I doubt that their decision was one made as a result of their knowledge of my plans. That, however, doesn’t change their fate. Anyone who stands in my path shall be

eliminated, be their intrusional intentional or otherwise.

“Crush them.”

“I already hired and sent a few people over, but none have managed to succeed.”

“Did they hire some sort of guard?”

“It seems like they’ve Iron Claw Colbert. He practically stays with them all day. The shopkeeper’s also an adventurer herself, and a D ranked one at that.”

“And what of Rynford’s subordinates? The only reason I decided to shelter him was so that he could be of use at times like these.”

Rynford was the name of one of Zerais’ fellow researchers. Specifically, Zerais had introduced him two months prior. Though he was a researcher, he appeared moreso like a mercenary. Most of his subordinates were well versed in combat. Many of them bore scars upon their knees, and thus, were suspicious. They likely would not have been allowed to enter the city if not for my influence. Nowadays, the man spent each day holed up within this precise manor. He was an even more peculiar man than Zerais himself, but, he too was useful, especially when it came time for the application of violence.

“Rynford had sent several of his level twenty plus subordinates, but...”

“You mean to say they failed? How ridiculous! The shop’s owner is but a mere D rank!”

“Not a single one of them has returned. Rynford’s assault was not actually the first. I began by hiring a set of lackeys from the city’s underground, but lost contact with them after sending them on their way. I can’t even confirm as to whether they’re dead or alive.”

“That... is concerning. Does the shop’s owner perhaps have some sort of hidden escort guarding her at all times?”

“I have no idea. I tried looking into her, but I all I could dig up was that she was a D ranked adventurer, and that she’d been rewarded with a near excessive number of spices for her contribution in defeating a set of pirates.”

“Place more effort into your investigations.”

“I already tried that. She’d only just arrived in Barbra, so detailed information about her is difficult to come by. The only other fact we have is that she came to the city aboard one of the Luciel Conglomerate’s ships. We did manage to bribe one of the ship’s workers, but all we got from him was the time in which she’d arrived at the city.”

In other words, there was no way for us to grasp ahold of her weaknesses!? Accursed peasant! I cannot believe that my plans are about to be spoiled by a mere plebeian.

“Shall we employ mercenaries then? I doubt she would be able to survive a wave of thirty regardless of the extent of her abilities.”

“Won’t your honoured father catch wind of your movements if you don’t keep them in moderation?”

“Tsk.”

My old man did have several subordinates within the city’s confines. There was a chance he’d catch wind of my plans for a coup d’etat if I didn’t keep my actions minimal. Fuck!

How obnoxious. How long does that old shit plan to stand in my way? The only reason I wished to take his seat in the first place was because of his lack of ability to discern quality.

“Your not worthy of the Lord’s position” my ass! My older brother is nothing short of trash. His only defining trait is his ability to be diligent. He lacks my intellect, and even so much as fails to to understand what it means to have a nobleman’s pride. The fact that he takes a servile attitude even when speaking with commoners irritates me to point of wanting to fucking strangle him!

He was nothing but a weak, weak man. I was a far more suitable heir, and it was precisely the knowledge of that fact that led me to wish to wrest the position from right under his nose.

My plan was to cause Barbra to descend into mayhem and then shift all the blame onto my father in order to force him into retirement. Normally, my brother would end up becoming the lord in such a case, so I’d arrange to have him killed in the chaos.

Causing all that chaos was Zerais’ job. The first plan we had was to have him poison a

group of plebeians and have them rampage. However, we soon realized that such a meagre act would take a few dozen lives at most.

Such a small scale event was far from what we needed to fulfil our desires. Thus, Zerais crafted a second, more devastating scheme, one that would cause the whole town to descend into not but madness and destruction.

Naturally, I accepted his proposal. It was one that would cause many to perish, but I paid it no mind. Most were mere plebeians, and thus, irrelevant. Little of value would be sacrificed.

There was, however, one key factor required for our plan to come to fruition: Waint Krystan, my mentally deficient younger brother.

Waint was so stupid that not even I, his flesh and blood, could resist proclaiming him a retard. He'd been born as a Marquis' third son, but he ended something as peasant-like as a chef for reasons nothing short of ridiculous. I paid little care to the details, but I recall his reasoning as something as nonsensical as adoring the taste of the food the Royal Palace's dishes.

He and I had two clearly distinct mentalities. If I were to follow ambitions like his, I would seek to become a titan by acquiring cooking-related businesses and expanding through investment. He, on the other hand, actually became a stupid fucking pleb, and even went as far as to open his own shop. I remember trying out his cooking once, but it'd consisted of nothing but flavourless garbage. Believe it or not, the moron had even lost all his ambition. All he desired now was become a famous chef, and so the retard developed the habit of buying expensive materials just so he could transform them into worthless plates of junk.

I never once suspected that his meaningless, idiotic ambitions would culminate in a form from which I could find use. I employed him by investing into his shop and financially subordinating him.

Nobles that wished to build connections with my father and I frequented the shop. However, for reasons unknown, they soon began to flatter the wrong individual. They spoke of my brother's accomplishments and named him a chef of skill. Sheer nonsense. Waint's ability was laughable. He himself lacked the skill to break through King of Cooking's preliminaries, so I offered my assistance through the act of donating to the Chef's Guild a large sum. Through said donation, I allowed my brother to bypass

the initial competition and immediately enter into the second round.

I later discovered, however, that he was even less of an intellectual that I'd surmised. The retard hired a gathering of loose-lipped grunts in order to harass his competitors. Shocked I was to see him even send a group after his own shop so he could perform a sort of stage act. His actions naturally led the guild to immediately begin an investigation, and thus, I once again had to step in as to prevent his disqualification. Many of the guild's staff members worked to retain the competition's fidelity. However, as was with all other organisations, there lay corrupt individuals within their ranks, all of which happily casted their duties aside in order to accept my bribes.

And that was the sequence of events that led up to this point, the point where I could finally put my plan into action.

The concept was as follows: Waint would make use of a specific class of magic-infused water, one that cursed any who ingested it. Of course, the plan was one doomed to fail lest we won over individuals within the guild — but that was a hurdle long overcome.

Our magic-infused water was a formula that Zerais and Rynford had developed in cohesion. I knew little of the details, but I was aware that the curse it spread was one that caused evil thoughts to develop within its victims. It could provoke any given individual into throwing a fit of violent rage so long as they consumed a substantial quantity of the substance. Most impressive was the substance's delayed effect. The plebeians that consumed it would only lose their minds after enough time had come to pass. Thus, they would disperse from the water's source before any sort of unnatural occurrence. Waint himself was nothing short of an idiot, and for reason unknown, thought what we had given to be plain magic-infused water. Everything was perfect; my pawn had not even so much as realized that he was being merely being used.

The publicity provided from the King of Cooking provided The Noble's Dish a grand total of 3000 customers each day. Basic mathematics led to the conclusion that the number of customers would ultimately culminate at approximately 10000, a number that more than satisfied my requirements. All that was needed was for us to let loose the familiars upon which Zerais had research in order to accomplish our goals.

The occurrence of such widespread insanity would leave Barbra's lord with no choice but to claim responsibility for the events that had perspired. He would be pardoned with only retirement if luck were to be on his side. However, there was also a chance

that the Lord himself would be resigned to a status equivalent to that of a criminal's. Barbra was a major portside city, and of great importance to the Kingdom. Failing in its governance was a grave sin.

Hah! The thought of sending my father to trial put an unerasable smile upon my face.

My plans had been perfect.

Yet, they'd failed.

A fool had accidentally thrown off my predictions through the act of creating a sort of bread that nullified curses. Ridiculous! It was nothing but ridiculous! Don't fuck with me!

Zerais' reports stated that the crime rate had indeed risen on a year to year basis. However, the situation had yet to spiral out of hand.

Something had to be done.

The Black Tail must be no more.

"Use *him*."

"Are you sure? He may end up causing quite the amount of damage."

"He is our only option!"

"Alright. I understand. I'll bring him here."

A man over two meters tall appeared before after ten minutes worth of waiting. His body was covered in a layer of scarred, coppery skin. His muscles appeared so expansive that the simple act of witnessing them led me to suspect that we never had the need to employ a method as roundabout as cursing the citizens in the first place. His flesh bore such strength that I would not have doubted any claims suggesting that his heritage had been part ogre.

He was Rynford's strongest subordinate, a former C ranked adventurer. The rumors said that he was just as strong as any B rank, but was denied promotion as a result of his behaviour. To verify the claim, I had him duel one of my former C ranked

subordinates. Lo and behold, he lived up to his reputation and vanquished the man in a matter of moments.

They called him Zerrosreed The Berserker. He had little interest in anything but strengthening his body. He was what one could call a battle fanatic, a warrior sought out powerful foes for the sole sake of self improvement. He was known to even turn his blade on his companions and allies on a daily basis without even the slightest shred of care. More than one of these occasions had culminated in the act of manslaughter.

That alone did was but one of his many faults. Zerrosreed was well known for a certain incident, an incident that provided him two things: expulsion from the adventurer's guild, and a bounty that extended throughout the continent. The man had been employed by a nearby country for the sake of war. However, as anticipated by many, he turned his blade on his allies for the sake of testing his strength, and so, he'd felled the country's prince, slayed him in cold blood. The act destroyed his allies' chain of command and caused them to lose most their forces. The country suffered a huge territorial loss, and thus, issued a price for his head. Such a act would cause many a warrior to live their lives in shame. He, however, had not the slightest semblance of repentance or atonement. In fact, the man claimed to be grateful. The bounty had led many a powerful to challenge him to combat.

Comprehending a specimen such as himself was impossible. All that I knew was that his brain was constructed of muscle, and that he possessed a ridiculous amount of power.

"I've a job for you."

"Haven't any chances to go on a good old rampage lately, so gimme something that'll let me loose."

"I see no problems satisfying that condition. A rampage is all I would ever hope from you to begin with."

"Hah hah hah! True, true."

I failed to see the reason for which the oversized man had clasped his belly in laughter, but cast all considerations aside. I needed not to understand but the fact that he could be used.

(Woof!)

“What was that...?”

I could have sworn that I caught wind of some sort of bark-like noise from a nearby room. That, however, was nonsensical. This manor was one that kept no pets, it was simply not possible for there to be such a sound.

“Perhaps I have allowed myself more exhaustion than is reasonable.”

The dog I heard was ultimately dismissed as a mere figment of my imagination.

CHAPTER 120

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

The second day was over, and so, Fran and I naturally had to begin preparing for the third. I really would've wanted everything go smoothly for once, but our processes were interrupted as we detected yet another group approaching the restaurant we were borrowing. This time, however, neither Fran nor I bothered to tense up or prepare ourselves for combat.

"Master."

[Yup, Urushi's back. Though. it looks like he's got a few people following him...]

"Four."

Focusing a bit more effort into reading our surroundings allowed me to figure out roughly what was going on. The people accompanying Urushi were all people we were pretty well acquainted with. That is, I was able to recognize them as Colbert and the three salesgirls. However, I wasn't able to intuit why they were here or even grouped up with Urushi to begin with.

"Woof woof woof!"

"Nn. Opening door now."

We welcomed our four employees inside, only to notice that the strongest of them had sustained an injury. Colbert was walking with a limp, and it didn't even look like he could stand on his own. Judith had to support him in order for him to make it indoors. The cloth wrapped around his left leg was already completely stained in crimson.

Damn. What happened?

"Injured?"

"Please don't mind me, I'm sorry for appearing before you in such a disgraceful manner. It was a minor blunder."

“He ended up getting hurt because he protected us.”

“Colbert probably would’ve won if we weren’t there to drag him down.”

“It was all our fault.”

There was no doubting that Colbert was strong. He had high stats, and it was strikingly obvious that he’d honed his technical skills as well. We knew for a fact that he was worthy of his rank. I understand that he had to protect The Scarlet Maidens and all, but still, that was a pretty big injury right there, one that could only have been inflicted by a formidable opponent.

“I happened to have a potion on hand, but its effect was not strong enough to heal all my injuries.”

“His whole foot had been torn off!”

Apparently the injury had been even worse just a bit earlier.

“Urushi saved us.”

“We were in a pretty bad spot, but Urushi managed to drive off the person that attacked us.”

“He appeared from the man’s shadow and executed a well timed sneak attack. It was quite a splendid maneuver.”

“He was really awesome!”

Ahhh, I see now. So that’s why they came back together.

“First, fix injury. Greater Heal.”

“Amazing! My injuries are closing so rapidly that I can see them vanishing before my very eyes.”

“Woah, you’re *this* good at healing magic too? Just how far ahead of me are you, Magic Sword Girl...? And just how depressed do you want me to be!?”

We had them sit down and explain what'd happened after making sure Colbert had gotten all healed up.

"What happened?"

"Well, it all started when we parted ways at the Chef's Guild. We were planning to head back to the inn we were staying at."

"The three of us have been staying there ever since we first started adventuring."

"I had planned to return to my residence after escorting the girls to theirs. Hence, I had accompanied them."

Apparently, they were attacked by a gigantic man over two meters tall before reaching their destination. It wasn't just some random indiscriminate attack either, the man had clearly recognized the girls, as he called out to them before initiating his assault.

"It was clear to that the man's objective was to eliminate all three members of The Scarlet Maidens."

"Absolutely sure?"

"Yup. He asked us whether or not we were The Black Tail's salesgirls."

"But he actually started attacking before waiting for us to answer."

"Don't tell anyone, but seeing him come at us like that almost made me wet myself."

In other words, the assailant knew what they looked like. He probably knew where they lived too, seeing as how he ambushed them along the way.

"Have any information about enemy?"

"Indeed we do. The man voiced his name as he attacked."

"Interesting."

"He called himself Zerrosreed, The Berserker. I'd thought that the rumours had been

but mere exaggerations, but I was clearly proven wrong.”

“I think he might actually be stronger than the rumours say he is.”

“Who?”

“Wait, you don’t know who he is? Really, Magic Sword Girl?”

“Nn.”

The guy was apparently famous, and all four of our companions felt it odd for Fran not to know his name.

“Heheh, then I’ll tell you all about him!”

Lydia quickly went over all the rumours and told us a bunch about the guy.

Apparently, he’d lose the ability to differentiate between enemies and allies the moment he engaged in combat. He even had a bounty on his head because he killed the prince of one of the countries that he was supposed to be working for. Dude sounded dangerous as hell.

The guild ranked him in at C, but rumours had said that his rank didn’t do him justice. Everyone present had merely dismissed the rumours as, well, mere rumours, but they’d evidently been shown to be true.

“He was really strong.”

“Urushi’s surprise attack was the only reason he resorted to retreating. As expected, not even a man as powerful as The Berserker could withstand a Darkness Wolf’s ambush.”

“Urushi. Good boy.”

“Woof.”

Urushi didn’t seem completely content despite being praised. I felt that he was disappointed at the fact that he was unable finish the man off, even though he’d managed to land a sneak attack.

Judith had a bit of an unsettled look on her face, which only made sense given how she was attacked by someone far stronger than her. Crap, we can't afford to have her quit on us.

I was worried that her party would give up on the task of selling curry bread, but my concerns turned out to be needless. Rather than succumbing to fear, she instead declared in defiance that she wanted to see the job through to the end. Her pride as an adventurer had completely overwhelmed her sense of terror. Colbert acted in a fairly similar manner, and got all fired up; he declared that he would defeat The Berserker next time the two of them crossed paths.

"Then looking forward. Working together tomorrow."

"Leave it to me!"

"Me too!"

"I'll do my best."

"Next time we run into each other, I'm giving that gorilla one hell of a bashing!"

We guided Colbert and the salesgirls over to the place we were staying after confirming their intentions. The district had a plentiful number guards within it, so we figured it would be safe. Initially, we'd planned to let them borrow our room if there weren't any more available, but the hotel's staff immediately made us a few arrangements the moment they caught sight of Colbert.

"You're heading out again, Magic Sword Girl?"

"Nn. Will be back by morning."

"Wait, wait! Don't tell me you're going after him!?"

"No. Going elsewhere."

"Alright then..."

"It's too dangerous to go alone!"

“Not alone. Together with Urushi.”

“Woof!”

“I understand... However, do make sure you return by the morning. We’ll be disqualified if you fail to make it back.”

“Nn. No problem.”

We went back to the kitchen so we could get Urushi to tell us what he’d found.

“Bark bark bark!”

“Nn?”

Urushi tried to relay his message by raising his front legs whilst making dog noises. We were able to get the fact that he was trying to tell us something, and that his message contents were rather urgent. However, we were unable to discern any further detail.

I was ready for this exact situation though. I’d devised a method that could potentially allow him to communicate with us, and so, I explained it to him.

“Woof!”

[You think you can pull it off? Alright, try it on me first.]

“Woof!”

[Hmm... Yeah, it didn’t work.]

The concept was to use the Level 8 Dark spell Brain Trick. The spell’s effect allowed one to directly implant anything they imagined into their target’s mind and thereby cause hallucinations. It sounded like a spell that would normally fall under the illusion element, but it wasn’t. It counted as dark due to the fact that it would operate directly on the target’s brain. As a result, it was much more difficult to detect than any sort of illusion based magic.

Specifically, the concept was to have Urushi project his memories as opposed to something he imagined. That, in turn, could potentially allow Urushi to communicate with us despite being incapable of speech.

However, it didn't go as smoothly as I'd assumed it would, probably because I didn't have a brain for the spell to mess with in the first place.

[Try it on Fran instead.]

"Woof!"

"Ready."

"Woof!"

"Nn! Can see clearly. Mastermind. Lord's second son."

"Woof woof!"

It seemed like it worked. Sweet, communicating with Urushi would be even easier going forward.

Fran explained to me everything Urushi had bore witness to.

[Alright. So, the lord's second son is the one behind everything.]

"Woof."

[Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever imagined that we ended up accidentally saving the city.]

"Surprising."

[But now he's after us because of it.]

I had to admit that we were a bit outmatched. We had to deal with Waint, Bluke, Zerais, Rynford, and even Zerrosreed The Berserker to top it all off.

We were up against an entire organisation, one that'd already weaved their web. It

was going to be tough, especially given how little time we had to deal with them.

I guess it'd help if we were to borrow an organisation's power as well... though I'm not all that sure that the people I had in mind would actually be willing to help us.

[Let's go pay the Lord's manor a quick visit.]

"Nn."

"Woof!"

CHAPTER 121

THE LORD'S MANOR

The Lord's Manor was smack in the middle of town, right where the commercial, residential and noble districts intersected. It was about a five minute trip with Urushi going at top speed.

"Comfortable sensation."

Fran narrowed her eyes as she enjoyed the cool night breeze. She normally probably would have found it chilly, but her armour was bestowed with cold resistance, so she found it pleasing instead. ^[1]

[Thank God it's night time.]

"Woof?"

Having Urushi leap through the sky at full speed during the day was a big no. We'd end up standing out way too much for comfort.

[Alright, it looks like we're here.]

The gate leading up to the manor's entrance was naturally tightly shut. In front of it stood a pair of guards. They seemed to be actively surveying their surroundings in order to ensure that nothing was off.

[Hmm, what do you think we should do? We're going to be wanting to see the lord, so, do you want to try and ask the guard for permission, or kinda just like head on inside?]

"Ask guards."

[Alright, but what if they say no? Cause I'm pretty sure they're going to end up asking us to leave.]

Realistically speaking, the chances of us actually getting an audience were pretty miniscule. We came in the middle of the night without any sort of appointment or

prior notice. Moreover, we weren't all that well known either. Fran was just another D ranked adventurer, and a young girl at that. The only two kinds of people that'd welcome her in this sort of situation were the overly nice and lolicons up to know good.

"Ask Flut and Satia."

[Fair enough.]

I mean, they did really want us to drop by, but they might've already gone to bed given the time. That said, contacting the Prince and Princess was pretty much the only real card we had to play. Yeahhh, the situation wasn't exactly what I'd call favourable by any means.

We figured that we'd probably have a better chance if we were a bit more upfront about the whole thing, so we descended at a location a bit further away and approached the gate in as natural a manner as possible. That said, both guards still found it rather strange for a child to be walking over to them at this time of day.

"A kid?"

"At a time like this?"

"Hi."

"W-What did you need?"

Sweet, it looks like they're at least going to hear us out instead of just chasing us away right off the bat.

"Came to see acquaintance."

"Are you sure you didn't get the wrong place? This here is the Lord's manor."

"I'm sure. Acquaintances staying here temporarily."

"Hahahah. Only members of the nobility ever stay at the Lord's manor."

"Alright, that's enough joking around from you. Go home, kid. It's late, and you should

be in bed.”

The guards were surprisingly good people. They didn’t shout at Fran to try and drive her away, and they even seemed genuinely worried about her.

“Flut and Satia. Should be here. Friends.”

“Flut, Satia? Who?”

“Wait, I’m fairly certain that Flut and Satia are the names of the Fyrias Kingdom’s prince and princess.”

“Oh, yeah, right. But those guys are royalty. There’s no way they’d be friends.”

“Hold on. I do remember them saying that one of their friends might end up paying them a visit, and that we should let said friend through should she come.”

“Ahhh, yeah. I remember now. H-Hey, what was your na – er, would you mind if I asked for your name?”

“Nn? Fran.”

“See, I knew it!”

“P-Please allow some time in order for us to authenticate any necessary details!”

And so, the guards ran around and exchanged information in a bit of a dumbfounded manner in order to confirm Fran’s identity.

The whole process ended up taking about a total of thirty minutes.

“How nice of you to visit!”

“We’re glad to see you again.”

“Nn. Me too.”

“We’ve heard much of your accomplishments. They say your entry in the King of Cooking is a dish completely unknown even to the judges themselves.”

“Our servants have claimed that they were extremely delicious. We really would like to try them ourselves.”

“Then stop by stall?”

“We can’t. We as royalty can’t possibly voice any dissatisfactions about the food Barbra’s lord is providing us. Besides, there’s all that troublesome food taster stuff too.”

Riiiiight. Royalty didn’t have the liberty to just walk around in order to buy and eat whatever they wanted. That applied all the more to both Flut and Satia seeing as how they’d only just recently avoided an assassination. Serid, who just happened to be standing by, ended up giving a bit of a frown in response to the the prince’s words.

“Then can just sneak a few. Here.”

“Awesome! So this is the rumoured curry bread?”

“It’s still warm!”

“Paramount of flavour.”

“I-It’s that delicious?”

“Nn.”

“We’ll gladly accept the offer.”

Flut and Satia happily grabbed the food Fran presented them without even a moment’s hesitation.

Wait, whatever happened to the food taster stuff?

I looked towards Serid, only to find that he actually wasn’t bothering to say or do anything. All he did was keep the same frown on his face. In fact, he, like the prince and princess, also took a serving of the dish when we ended up deciding to offer it to him. He actually just took it without even the slightest bit of suspicion.

It looked like he actually trusted Fran. Though, I guess that did make sense. There was no reason for her to poison anyone present, especially after all they'd been through together.

"It tastes really good!"

The princess was the first to react.

"I think it might be the most delicious thing I've ever had!"

"Me too!"

"I do admit that the dish is indeed mortifyingly delicious."

The fact that all three of them enjoyed it made me feel pretty good about myself. It seemed even royalty was within curry bread's strike zone.

"Curry is best."

"That's a claim I'm more than capable of understanding."

"Nn."

Fran looked at all three of Flut, Satia and Serid with a smug expression on her face. She ended up giving a happy nod each and every single time any of the three said the words "tasty" or "delicious."

[It should be about time for us to get down to business.]

"Nn?"

Apparently, Fran'd been so happy with everyone's reactions that she'd completely forgotten why we came here in the first place.

[We paid them a visit because we needed to see the Lord, remember?]

"Right. Accidentally forgot."

"What's wrong, Fran?"

“Came to ask a favour.”

“What kind of favour? We’ll try our best to see it through if it’s something we can help you with.”

“Nn. Want to see Barbra’s Lord.”

“You wanted to see Sir Rhodas? What for?”

“Tomorrow. Coup d’etat.”

“Did you state that there would be a coup d’etat!? Explain to us the details immediately!”

Serid interjected the moment he heard about the the coup.

And so, Fran told the three everything she knew. She described the second son’s treachery, and the third son’s involvement therein while also making mention of the assassinations ordered.

Her explanation led Flut to immediately rise to his feet.

“Serid, I command you to arrange us a meeting with Sir Rhodas immediately.”

“By your will, Your Highness!”

“Believing me?”

It looked to us like the prince had taken Fran’s words to heart; his expression betrayed not even the slightest bit of doubt.

“I do. I know that I can trust you, Fran.”

“The images Urushi showed us looked quite realistic as well.”

“Telling a lie of such a caliber can result in execution, and I hardly take you for such a fool.”

And so, with that said, Serid left the room in order to book us an appointment with the Lord. Flut and Satia were royalty. Their words held quite the weight to them, so much weight, in fact, that the Lord himself came to their room before even five minutes had passed.

“I have come to answer your summons, Your Highnesses?”

“I’d like to introduce you to a friend of ours before we begin our discussions.”

“Fran. Adventurer. Nice to meet you.”

Rhodas was a noble with an incredible amount of power, but he ended shaking Fran’s hand with a nod of acknowledgement regardless. It looked to me that he was being as careful as possible to ensure that he kept the Prince and Princess in a good mood. Treating her without respect despite the introduction would likely lead to the opposite of his desired result.

“And I am Rhodas Krysten, Barbra’s Lord. Your Highnesses, did you perhaps call for me in order to allow for this introduction?”

“Unfortunately that’s not all. We’d like for you to listen to what she has to say.”

“I see...? Very well then.”

I had to say, Rhodas was truly an exemplary noble. He was probably overloaded with doubts and questions, but he managed to retain a poker face and his answer only indicated the slightest bit of hesitation. He knew that he was dealing with royalty, and that it’d be best for him to go along with their demands.

“Nn. Here to discuss second and third sons.”

“Are you perhaps referring to Bluke and Waint?”

“Nn.”

And so, Fran told Rhodas basically exactly what he’d just told Fyrians. Naturally, not even a noble as accomplished as him could remain calm when told of the fact that his kids were scheming up a coup.

“That’s preposterous! On what sort of ridiculous foundation could you possibly base those claims!?”

He eventually became unable to hold it any longer, and ended up cutting Fran off with a shout.

“The truth.”

“Then you must surely possess evidence!”

He rose from his chair whilst continuing to yell despite the fact that he was still in the presence of royalty.

“Urushi.”

“Woof!”

“A-And what precisely might you be doing now?”

“Don’t worry Sir Rhodas. No harm will come to you. Please relax.”

“Y-Your Highness, I...”

“Woof!”

“Ugh... I...”

Seeing Urushi’s memories caused Rhodas to grimace. It didn’t seem like he was willing to what he’d just witnessed.

“What you’ve presented me fails to suffice as evidence... But I highly doubt that a girl as young as yourself would otherwise have knowledge of Zerais’ features... Moreover, it is indeed a fact that this year’s festival has seen many more arrests than any other in the past. “

He started muttering under his breath while sorting through the details.

“Well, Sir Rhodas? What are your thoughts on the matter?”

“We have yet to see any solid evidence, and as such, I cannot agree to deploying all the city’s troops.”

“I understand your concerns, but the danger posed by a potential coup d’etat should not simply be overlooked.”

“Before we discuss the matter any further, I must ask something of you, Your Highness. Do you trust the words that the young lady before us has said on this day?”

“I have full faith in her.”

“I see...”

The Lord spent a bit of time contemplating the pros and cons of each of his options.

If I were to guess, I’d say that he probably first considered if his sons were trustworthy. The next factor he thought of was likely whether or not listening to the Fyrians was a good move from a political standpoint. They were royalty, but they also hailed from a completely different country. He didn’t necessarily need to heed their words, but, doing so would allow him to build with them a trusting relationship. Moreover, they’d owe him a favour if we were wrong about the whole thing. The last thing he probably ended up debating was if what he’d been shown through magic was something that’d actually happened.

And so, after a few minutes passed, he finally managed to come to a decision.

“I understand the circumstances and will act accordingly. I cannot arrest either of my sons without evidence. However, I will have the guards that normally work throughout the night restrain them whilst claiming to be functioning as escorts. I will also work to increase the number of guards on patrol in order and have them search for both Zerais and Zerrosreed. I will then mobilize an additional unit in order to collect evidence as to not make waste of time.”

“We will contribute our own guards to your forces as well. The more heads we have, the easier the task will be to achieve.”

Honestly, we’d hoped for him to mobilize all his troops in order for him to quickly capture and arrest Bluke and his companions, but that was unrealistic, and what he was now was still sufficient. Besides, the troops Flut and Satia brought along were

going to join in as well, so we still had more than enough manpower.

“Got it.”

“And where, might I inquire, are you headed off to now?”

Rhodas questioned Fran as she rose from her seat. He’d probably assumed that she was just going to sit here and wait until the whole thing was done and over with.

“Finding evidence.”

We figured it’d be a good for us to take either Zerrosreed or Zerais into custody.

[Alright, Urushi. We’re going to be counting on that nose of yours, boy.]

“Woof.”

“Will be back.”

CHAPTER 122

OF PROGRESS AND SUDDEN CHANGES IN SITUATION

Rhodas had hesitated in coming to a decision, but immediately swapped to a series of quick, decisive actions the moment he did. That is, he managed to sortie his troops within the hour.

A part of his rapidity was due to the lack of a need to make any sort of major preparation. He didn't bother delivering an address. He simply told the guards that they were taking Waint and Bluke into custody, and that was that.

And of course, we ended up having to join them so we could show them to the manor's location.

[Urushi, can you tell if the lord's second son is actually there or not right now?]

(Woof!)

[Alright, good.]

It would've been a huge pain in the ass to end up not finding the Lord's second son present even after going out of our way to get what was effectively a warrant for his arrest.

The lord had his troops stand by as soon as they entered sight range of our target. Turned out that he was still indeed hesitating, which, honestly, was pretty fair. He didn't have any real evidence, the only thing he had to go off of was what he probably thought to be a suspicious girl's testament. He didn't know exactly who owned the manor, and thus, could potentially have to end up being liable for any damages caused, especially seeing as he was basically about to have the city's guards assault it.

In other words, it was up to us to take the initiative.

[Fran.]

"Nn."

“W-Whatever are you doing!? Return at once!”

Fran dashed out in front whilst ignoring Rhodas’ protests. Our target was the gatekeeper. We didn’t want to end up having to argue with him, and we figured that getting him talk would probably help convince the Lord that we were in the right.

“Huh?”

I appraised the man and verified that he was not only a criminal, but also afflicted with the whole heart of evil thing. Only after confirming all that did we strike; Fran silenced him by smacking him in the face with her fist.

We then tied him up and gagged him before healing him and waking him up.

“Mrrggphh!”

“Quiet.”

“Mrrggphh!”

Specifically, Fran had woken him up by kicking him hard enough to bend his spine into something that seemed to resemble a “less than” symbol. She then repeated the process until he finally stopped resisting. ^[1]

Only after that did Rhodas finally approach, several aides in tow.

“A-And what is it that you are doing right now?”

“Nn? Interrogation.”

“It appeared as but mere torture to me... That aside, who precisely is that man?”

“Dunno specifics. Some enemy.”

“And do you possess the evidence to support that claim?”

“Could tell at a glance.”

“Does that not simply mean that you have none whatsoever?”

Rhodas planted his face into his palms as he shook his head back and forth. He didn't have the ability to use appraisal, so he obviously had no clue that the man was indeed one of our enemies. Thus, he was probably contemplating what he was going to do about this whole situation.

“Will ask questions now. Answer honestly, no more pain. Make a fuss, death.”

Hearing Fran's words caused the gatekeeper to nod as fast as he could, with his face as pale as could be. He ended up just sitting there, looking at us meekly after we removed his gag.

“This manor. Who is owner?”

“The place is owned by The Eathra Company. I-I'm just a lowly guard, s-so that's all I know!”

Hmmm, didn't look like he was lying.

“Eathra Company?”

Dannan, one of Rhodas' older aides, filled us in on a few details after he happened to catch sight of Fran repeating the unfamiliar name under her breath. Dannan was actually quite the impressive guy. He took on every single chamberlain-esque duty whilst also managing the lord's domestic affairs. Moreover, he was even about as strong as the average D ranked adventurer. The old man was seriously just a huge bundle of talent.

“The Eathra Company is a subsidiary under Sir Bluke's Tormayo Corporation. It is known as a rather greedy company, and widely detested as a result.”

The Tormayo Corporation was actually a rather expansive business. It mainly focused around the sale of luxuries to nobles, many of which Bluke would personally introduce to the store. It had so much wealth and influence that not even the Lord himself could really do much to it, at least not openly.

The Eathra Company had The Tormayo Corporation backing them every step of the way, so they were pretty much able to avoid all inspections and audits.

"I recall Sir Bluke stating that he knew little of Tormayo's subsidiaries as he'd left management of its affairs to one of his retainers....."

Yeaahhhh, no. That was obviously a lie.

"Man named Bluke here?"

"Oh, you're talkin about the guy that Eathra's manager keeps bowing to, right? If so, then he's definitely here. I see him all the time, so I can say fer sure that he went inside a couple hours back."

"Last question. You, do lots of bad things?"

"Er, well, I..."

"Hmm..."

A loud cracking sound resounded through the night as Fran kicked the man in the back hard enough to cause tears to flow from his eyes.

"I-I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I'll answer your question, so please, stop already!"

"Then answer. Shouldn't have hesitated in first place."

"I've done lots of bad things. I've kidnapped women and dragged em back over. I've even done myself some arson when the company was faced with competition."

The Eathra Company was pretty much made to do all The Tormayo Corporation's dirty work. In essence, the company basically constituted the corporation's dark side, but they were positioned in such a manner that they could be cut off with ease if their crimes were to come to light. Under normal conditions, their activities would likely have had remained in the dark due to Bluke's influence, but even so, the company had still gone out of their way to base itself in a location that made it easy for the people involved to cover stuff up.

"And is Bluke aware of all that is going on?"

"I would say that is a reasonable conclusion, given all the factors mentioned."

Dannan's response to the Lord's question caused him quite a bit of grief.

"I can't believe it... For Bluke, for my own son to be involved in *this* line of business..."

Rhodas seemed to be the doting type. Or rather, the type that trusted the members of his family unconditionally.

"People that cross Bluke get it bad. I've heard he's killed a few, and sold a few others off into the illegal slave market."

"C-Cease with your lies immediately... Bluke would never..."

Rhodas continued to protest, but it seemed that he'd started to doubt his son's deeds. His tone had lacked its usual strength.

"I deprived him of his right to inherit my rule as a result of the intolerable manner in which he had looked upon the city's common folk, and I had expected him to repent for his misdeeds as a result..."

"It appears that depriving him of his right to succeed has instead caused him to throw a temper tantrum."

"That can't be... Bluke..."

Wait wait, did Dannan just call this a temper tantrum? I'm pretty sure this counts as a bit more than just that. They do realize that he's trying to kill his older brother and usurp his position, right?

"Very well. I will speak to Bluke myself. The testimony to which I have just born witness suffices as enough evidence to warrant action. Guards, I order you, take all who resist into custody, and if you happen to chance upon Bluke... Arrest him."

"As you will, my Lord!"

We used the gatekeeper's key to get ourselves within the building's premises.

We had the sixty person group split in half. Thirty odd troops surrounded the building, whilst the rest infiltrated and performed a raid.

Bluke had a bunch of his men stationed within the manor, but they were unable to stand up to the city's guards. Hence, they were arrested and detained, one after the other. Resisting didn't do them any good.

Appraising them led to the conclusion that every single individual had been afflicted with both the Heart of Evil and Enraged status conditions. Did Bluke have all his subordinates drink the magic-infused water they made? I guess the only way to find out is to ask him ourselves.

We arrived in front of Bluke's door after about five minutes. Urushi had found him with Presence Detection, so we knew for a fact that he was there.

Fran slammed the door open, only to find the man rummaging through his desk. It looked like he'd realized that something was going on, so he was getting some cash ready in order to ensure his escape.

"N-Name yourself!"

"Nn. Will not give name to criminals."

"And you believe that you have the right to make such a claim despite trespassing as we speak?"

"Trespassing, she is not, Bluke. Her actions abide perfectly by law, as she is currently in the midst of an investigation with regards to an organization suspected to be engaged in criminal actions."

"What? Father!? For what reason are you here...?"

"That would be a question I myself would also like to ask. Bluke, for what reason are you within the confines of a criminal organisation?"

"What are you saying, father?"

Bluke started to make an excuse, but I didn't really care. My attention was directed elsewhere, specifically, at the fact that he was afflicted by the same two status conditions as everyone else in the building.

The hell? Did he drink the magic-infused water he made? That makes no sense. I mean, why would he? And does Enraged have anything to do with the whole Heart of Evil thing? Or are they independent of each other?

A soldier entered the room as I pondered.

“We’ve completed our mission sir. The entire manor is now under our control. We found a few wanted criminals within, but have managed to detain each and every single one. We also came across several young girls believed to be victims of the underground slave market. We’ve taken them into custody for the sake of protection.”

Both the wanted criminals and illegal slaves served to provide indisputable, incriminating evidence. There was no way Bluke could get away with the whole thing by just saying that he didn’t know about it.

“I will listen to all that you have to say once we arrive at the Knights’ Headquarters. However, be aware that I bear not the will to listen to mere excuses.”

“Impossible...! This is impossible! Impossible I say! How did you catch wind of my activities!?”

Did he seriously expect anyone not to notice? Did he think himself an intellectual, and his plan super solid or something? Did he not realize that it was built atop a logical fallacy to begin with?

Like, why did he think he could become Barbra’s Lord by making his father step down from his position? If the ordeal was actually so serious that they needed to arrest the Lord for it, then the country definitely wouldn’t have let his family retain any power. Rhodas’ whole household would’ve gone down with him.

Oh well, either way, we managed to stop the coup, which was good. All we had to do now was to reduce the number of victims by detaining Waint and preventing him from selling anything his stuff tomorrow.

We could cure the abnormal stats conditions that all the people had by feeding them the Recovery Water we’d made. So yeah, all was fine and dandy.

Or it should’ve been, had Bluke not suddenly started screaming.

“Guhguahhhhh!”

“B-Blake? What is the matter?”

“Gugugaugagaguaguaguaaaaaaaaah!”

Blake’s body began giving a black aura. Okay, yeah that totally didn’t look all fine and dandy.

[Fran, have him drink the Water of Recovery.]

“Nn. Urushi, hold down.”

“Bark!”

Urushi held Blake in position with his front paws as the man convulsed and continued to scream. Fran approached him and tried to pour some of the Water of Recovery out and into his mouth, but he kept moving and refused to drink even a single drop.

“Urushi, turn upside down.”

“Woof.”

Urushi did as he was told and flipped Blake over so he had his back against the ground. Fran then finally managed to pry his mouth open and make him down several gulps of the Water of Recovery.

[Shit, we didn’t make it in time!]

I’d thought that we finally managed to resolve the situation, but I was wrong. Appraising him didn’t result in what I’d expected.

General Information

Species Name: Evil Human (Evil Being)

Level: 1

Status Condition: Insane, Rampaging.

HP: 61

MP: 70

STR: 26

VIT: 31
AGI: 18
INT: 33
MGC: 36
DEX: 24

Skills

Intimidation: Lv 2
Martial Arts: Lv 1

Innate Skills

Evil Arts: Lv 1

Titles

Evil God's Slave

Description: Unknown.

His status page looked exactly like that of a magic beast's, and his species totally said he'd turned into some type of evil being. ^[2] The way his level had reverted back to one almost made it seem like he'd undergone some sort of evolution. That said, his stats were super high for a mere level one's. He obviously wasn't as strong as we were, but he probably had the strength to take down a guard.

Good thing he wasn't an adventurer, or really strong to begin with or anything like that. If that were the case, we probably would've been screwed.

"Giggagagagagagaaaaa!"

"Gugagagagagaaa!"

And then, it happened. A series of similar screams resounded from outside the manor's confines.

^[1] It's this symbol <. This is actually a pretty common description in Japanese novels. More literally, the person is said to be bent into < (hiragana 'ku') shape.

^[2] The kobolds were also called evil beings.

CHAPTER 123

LUZERIO

Shouts and screams erupted from the building's exterior as presence detection went off and informed me of a series of enemies.

Shit. It looked like Bluke wasn't the only one that'd transformed.

"Bluke! Bluke, answer me! Whatever is the matter, Bluke!"

"Approaching, bad idea."

"Blu-ugh!"

Rhodas ignored Fran's warning and tried to approach his son, only to be immediately met with a kick therefrom despite the fact that Urushi was still holding the newly transformed Evil Human down.

"Sir Rhodas! Are you unharmed?"

"W-Worry not. I am fine."

Rhodas stared blankly in a mix of shock and pain as Dannan helped him back up to his feet.

Naturally, his stare did nothing to halt, or even slow down Bluke's transformation. The second son's eyes were dyed a pure, jet black; his pupils almost seemed to disappear entirely. His skin had started to undergo a similar process; every last bit of it was tainted as black as the night itself as his muscles swelled till they bulged to the point of abnormality. Everything about him had changed, save for the features on his face. An eerie, sickening result.

I felt the urge to cut him down immediately, but refrained. His father was watching, and we wished not for Barbra's lord to resent us.

Besides, there might actually be some way for us to turn him back to normal. Bluke

knew tonnes about things areas in which we wanted more knowledge, so having him regain his sanity could potentially allow us to derive from him a fair amount of useful information.

“Guruuuuuaaaaaahhh!”

He continued to struggle against his capture. It looked like he’d lost all sense of reasoning, and was unwilling to be detained.

Alright, for the time being, we should try having him drink a bit more of the Water of Recovery to see if it does anything.

And... nope.

Fine. What if we used Anti Curse?

And... also nope.

Our tests led us to realize that he wasn’t actually in an abnormal state.

Both the Insane and Rampaging states were considered to be his default states, and thus, we weren’t able to get rid of either condition. In other words, we were going to have one hell of a hard time turning him back to normal or taking him in quietly.

[Let’s see if we can make him stop moving around.]

“Nn. Urushi, let go.”

“Woof.”

“Stun Bolt.”

“Grooooogaaaaa!”

Bluke had tried getting up the moment Urushi let go of him, but Stun Bolt had inflicted him with paralysis. And hence, he was now once again on the ground. He was still conscious, but no longer able to move.

[Alright Urushi, hold him down again. Have him stay there till we tell you otherwise.]

“Woof.”

[Let’s go take care of everything happening in the garden, Fran.]

“Nn.”

Fran rushed back into the hallway and leapt through one of the windows that faced the building’s garden, shattering it in the process.

[It looks like everyone that got arrested ended up transforming.]

All ten of the men that taken into custody had ended up breaking out of their bindings as a result of their “evolutions.” There were far fewer of them than there were guards, but they still seemed to have the advantage due to their disparately high stats.

“What now? Capture all?”

[Eh... nah. Let’s just kill them. Detaining each and every single one would end up being a huge pain in the ass. Besides, they’re criminals anyways, so they’d probably just end up getting sentenced to death even if we did find out how to turn them back to normal.]

I mean, that’s kinda just what happens to anyone with a hand in a failed coup d’etat.

“Got it.”

Fran accelerated through the use of Air Jump and used the resulting momentum to immediately cleave one of the Evil Humans in half. I threw in a wind spell and took out a second as she landed.

The captured men had been ruffians to begin with, so they were quite a bit stronger than Blue. Evolution had turned each into an E or so ranked threat.

That said, they still weren’t anywhere close to being our match; it only took us about three minutes to finish them all off. I was honestly kind of disappointed by the results. They were actually pretty strong. I was expecting to be able to absorb their magic stones and get myself a few points. I was quite interested in all the skills they had too, but it turned out that they didn’t actually have magic stones. Oh well, can’t be helped,

I guess.

The guards ended up falling onto their butts in exhaustion the moment they saw the last Evil Human fall.

We knew that they were tired, but, we would have to bother them a bit more. And so, Fran approached a man whose armour seemed a bit flashier than the rest, the guy we presumed was the squad's chief.

"Hey."

"Y-Yes? What did you need?"

The chief immediately tensed up and straightened his back as he realized Fran wanted to talk to him. It looked to me like he was feeling a mix of respect and terror for Fran's strength.

"All the people in the manor accounted for?"

"Yes ma'am. The only other people we found inside are the ladies right over there."

Following the chief's line of sight led us to a group of young girls, currently huddled up and trembling in fear. Quickly appraising them informed me that there wasn't really anything wrong with any of them as far as status abnormalities went.

"Zerais, alchemist. Rynford, old man. Both not here?"

"I didn't catch sight of either of the two."

I'd assumed that the troops had managed to arrest the two of them, but apparently that wasn't the case at all. We went around and inspected the faces on all the Evil Humans we killed just to make sure, but we didn't actually find either of the two.

In other words, Bluke was, in fact, not actually the mastermind behind all this. The real mastermind had somehow caught wind of our actions and escaped. Moreover, he'd even manage to retaliate. Was this whole Evil Human transformation thing time based? Or was it done through some sort of remote controlled device? I couldn't actually tell which of the two it was, but I could at least say that both would definitely be a pain in the ass to deal with.

Hmm... What now? We could have Urushi try sniffing around in order to track the guy down. We could also potentially search the manor and see if we could find any sort of clue.

(Master.)

[Yeah? What's up?]

(There.)

Fran pointed to the area lying behind the slaves we'd saved. There, we saw the gatekeeper, still tied up just as he'd been before.

Wait. He didn't transform? What?

He was currently afflicted with the "Agitated Heart of Evil" status condition. Unlike the other guys though, he didn't have the enraged thing applied to him. Hmmmm... I guess that means the whole transformation thing is based on the amount of the magic-infused water one ingests? If so, then we were in luck, as it meant that the townsfolk that happened to have the former status abnormality wouldn't end up transforming.

That said though, we couldn't just leave the whole situation as it was right now.

We couldn't actually get any use out of the Lord. He was still in a state of shock as a result of his son transforming into a sort of inhuman monster right before his very eyes. Hence, we decided that it'd be better for us to talk to Dannan instead.

"Understand?"

"Indeed. I see that you were telling the truth, and the situation is looking even worse than initially anticipated."

We didn't know exactly how many people were in danger of turning into Evil Humans, but chances were, it was more than just a mere ten or twenty. Moreover, it was fairly probably that they'd end up transforming in highly populated, public areas, which, of course, would lead to one hell of a problem.

"Rally troops."

“That I will. The situation is nothing short of an emergency, and thus, we are also justified in mobilizing the knights.”

We informed Dannan of the specifics on how to differentiate those that might transform and those that might not.

“I see, so we must use Appraisal and be wary of those that carry the Enraged condition.”

“Nn.”

“I understand. We shall immediately dispatch a request to the Adventurer’s Guild in order to secure several individuals capable of appraisal. Unfortunately, we will not be able to hire nearly as many as is possible. It is important for us to ensure that these events remain unknown to the public.”

Yeahhhh, Rhodas might *actually* end up having to resign if everything ended up coming to light. It seemed that ideally, he wanted to punish Bluke and Wait behind closed doors, secretly find and heal everyone affected by the abnormal status conditions, and finally somehow manage to catch both Zerais and Rynford.

“Would you mind continuing to lend us your strength?”

“Don’t mind. Will chase down alchemist. Zerais.”

“Please and thank you. We will ensure we reward you accordingly.”

“Got it. Will first wander around manor. Searching for clues.”

“Please do. I suspect there to be several hidden rooms given the property’s scale. Be wary of their potential existence.”

“Nn.”

We had Urushi taken off Bluke-stomping duty, and instead tied the man up super tight before telling the guards to keep an eye on him. We needed our wolf’s nose, so we couldn’t have him babysit the Lord’s son forever.

[Alright boy, we’re going to need you sniff around to see if you can find strong traces

of Zerais' scent anywhere. Find everything you can, be it his lab or a secret passageway.]

“Woof!”

Urushi started wandering the manor whilst putting his sense of smell to work. After wandering around aimlessly for a bit, he finally ended up choosing to descend into the building's basement. I'd a few suspicions about the building's underground section, and it turned out that they'd been spot on.

The black wolf ultimately ended up leading us to a doorway.

“Woof bark woof!”

“Can't feel anyone inside.”

[But I guess this is the place that smells most like him?]

“Woof!”

Fran opened the door to find a facility that could only ever be described as a laboratory. It very much reminded me of Jean's.

I couldn't help but want to grab all the tools left lying around for myself. Most, we could get use out of the, and the rest could fetch us a pretty penny on the market. Unfortunately though, I couldn't actually grab any of it. The current circumstances more or less dictated that everything here now belonged to the Lord, and thus, taking the items for myself counted as theft. Oh well, we didn't have the time to grab it all anyways, seeing as how we were stuck chasing Zerais.

[I guess I'll have to pass it all up...]

“Nn.”

That said, there wasn't actually too much of value left sitting around. I mean, there were a few potions and the raw materials used therein, but all the stuff here was stuff you could pretty much get anywhere.

I tried looking at a few of the documents he had sitting around, but wasn't really able

to make much sense of them. I was, however, able to discern that none of them contained any information that could potentially assist us in chasing the man down. I was feeling a bit down because of it, but luckily, Urushi wasn't done just yet.

He sat himself down in front of a bookshelf and started scratching at the wall.

Wait, don't tell me they actually had a secret escape route installed? Seriously? I moved myself over to Urushi and started to give the wall a good stare, but I couldn't see any cracks or anything.

I tapped the supposed secret wall and several others with Telekinesis just to compare the sounds. Surely enough, the one right in front of me sounded much more hollow than the rest.

Hmm... but how did the hidden mechanism work? I mean, that bookshelf looked super suspicious, especially if you thought about all the stereotypes that came with this sort of situation. It could be one of the books... but it could also be the wall. Maybe there's a place to press down somewhere? Man, thinking about all this is actually starting to get decently fun.

"Master? Spotted something?"

[Hmm, well, I'm pretty sure that there's a hidden passage right here, but I can't figure out how to open it. Oh, right, you should try figuring out the trick too, Fran. It's pretty fu-]

"Like this?"

The room was suddenly filled by a loud thump as Fran gave the wall a full forced front kick.

It immediately gave into her strike and revealed the secret passageway despite having been covered in a layer of protective magic.

[Umm... Fran...?]

"One more time."

She followed the front kick up with a spin kick and applied so much strength that she

caused the entire room to start shaking. The wall was unable to sustain the force of the blow, and ended up collapsing and revealing a stairwell.

[Well... Whatever works works, I guess.]

“Nn? Let’s go.”

“Woof.”

Urushi began leading us down the stairs, and into a large, earthen tunnel. It clearly an escape route, and naturally, it didn’t have any sort of traps built into it.

“Someone’s there.”

[Yeah, I can feel his bloodthirst emanating from all the way over here.]

Crisis Detection kicked itself into action and warned us that whatever we were about to fight was more than just a mere small fry.

[Let’s make sure we’re ready to jump right into battle.]

“Nn.”

[Urushi, you stay hidden boy.]

“Woof.”

We cautiously advanced for about five minutes before finally reaching an area with about twenty meters of space in every direction. At the center of it all sat the thing that’d been thirsting for blood.

It was a man, one with a gentle looking smile, the sight of which for some odd reason pissed me off to no end.

“You know, I was seriously wonderin what kind of person it’d take to actually find that little escape route of ours. Never in my life would I have guessed it to be a mere little girl.”

“Zerais’ subordinate?”

“Wazzat? You seriously think someone as fuckin awesome as me would serve that gloomy-lookin, pussy ass bitch?”

General Information

Name: Luzerio

Age: 36

Race: Human

Job: Concealed Spearman

State: Heart of Evil

Status Level: 35/99

HP: 266

MP: 214

STR: 131

VIT: 129

AGI: 178

INT: 90

MGC: 121

DEX: 130

Skills

Assassination: Lv 5

Espionage: Lv 4

Evasion: Lv 5

Presence Detection: Lv 4

Sword Arts: Lv 2

Torture: Lv 6

Blink: Lv 5

Spear Techniques: Lv 7

Spear Arts: Lv 8

Short Sword Arts: Lv 3

Poison Resistance: Lv 3

Paralysis Resistance: Lv 6

Trap Detection: Lv 2

Vigour Manipulation

Pain Reduction

Titles

Mass Murderer

One who Inflicts Suffering

Servant to the Evil God

Equipment

Pointed Mithril Spear

Venomous Monkey Fang Short Sword

Black Wolf's Leather Full Body Armour

Dark Mithril Gauntlet

Mantle of Espionage

Heat Resistant Bracelet

Ring of Escape

Huh, that's the first time I've ever seen the Torture skill.

Torture

Rarity Level 3

Boosts idea generation during torture. Also increases the amount of pain inflicted to victims of torture.

His titles honestly made him look like a piece of shit. He was even apparently a Servant to the Evil God.

It was a bit different than Bluke's title, which claimed him to be the Evil God's Slave. This guy had the exact same title as the kobold we'd fought a few days back. I couldn't tell the difference between being the God's slave and servant, and unfortunately, Appraisal wasn't really helping me as much as I wanted it to be. It just kept spitting out that the title's description was unknown.

"Then, Zerrosreed's subordinate?"

"You fuckin kidding me!? You think I'd obey that retarded musclehead?"

It seemed that we'd flipped his switch. It was clear as day that he knew Zerrosreed, but the two didn't exactly get along.

"Only man I'd ever fuckin serve would be an Evil Arts User like Rynford. And you see, unlike that Zerrosreed retard, I've actually got brains, so Rydford trusts me ya know?"

Huh? Evil Arts User? That's the first real thing we've actually learned about the old man. The way things sounded made it seem like he was the real mastermind behind all this.

That said, it seemed that this Rynford guy was real cold hearted. He was totally willing to order his subordinates to throw away their lives just so he could buy himself a bit of time.

[Alright, let's tie him up and wring him of all he knows.]

“Nn.”

“Kuhahahahaha! You seriously wanna go? Alright, bring it on brat, I'll make you regret *everything*.”

Luzerio took up a stance with his spear and readied himself for combat.

CHAPTER 124

LUZERIO'S "TRUMP CARD"

Fran smashed me into Luzerio's spear and caused a series of sparks to illuminate the underground space.

She was much more skilled than him, but had to hold back so we could keep him alive for information's sake. Moreover, he had range on her, and was actually decently strong to begin with. He could match the average C ranked adventurer.

The combination of all the aforementioned factors led the two to fight roughly on par with one another. Unfortunately for Luzerio though, said abilities had caused him to realize why he still continued to draw breath.

"Fuck! Just die already, you shitty brat!"

"Refuse."

"Fuck! Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck! How the fuck is a fucking kid strong enough to go even with me!?"

"Stop with denial. Not going even."

"Shaddappppp!!!!"

He'd probably planned to take his time toying with Fran, but reality had instead grasped his dignity and slapped him in the face with it, for it was she and not he that ended up holding back. The fact that his strikes weren't even so much as leaving scratches caused him to start screaming in frustration.

It would be in our best interest to wrap this up as quickly as possible so we could chase Rynford down, but his Paralysis Resistance was pretty high level, so I figured we probably wouldn't be able to get him with Stun Bolt.

[Alright, I'm going to mess him up next time we clash. Try not to kill him if you can.]

(Got it.)

“Just die already mother fuckerrrrr!!!!”

I cast Wind Wall without chanting the moment Luzerio extended his spear in an attempt to get some decent damage in and caused his strike to deviate far from its intended path.

“What!?”

“Opening.”

Fran immediately knocked his weapon aside as I followed up my spell with another.

[Stun Bolt!]

“Garghghg!”

Yeeaaap, I knew he wouldn’t end up getting paralyzed.

“You fucking braaaaughhhh!!”

Stun Bolt didn’t really do anything but make him flinch, so he immediately turned around and reached to grab his spear. However, he was interrupted by Urushi, who promptly leapt out of his shadow and gave one of his legs a good bite.

“Growl!”

“Graahhghghgh!”

His right shank had been completely detached from his body. He promptly lost his balance and fell over while staring at his severed limb with a flabbergasted look on his face.

“...M-My leg! My legggg!!!!”

He glared at both Fran and Urushi whilst grinding his teeth in hatred and rage. It almost looked as if his stare alone could cause some sort of curse.

In spite of that, seeing Fran point her blade at his face caused him to ultimately give up. He dropped the dagger he'd pulled seemingly out of nowhere, and ended up collapsing in a bit of a slump.

"Want information about Rynford."

"The fuck you wanna know?"

"Describe."

"Heh. Rynford is one helluva man. He's got the ability to bless people with the Evil God's power. He lets us junk this shitty human shell we've got so we can ascend and evolve!"

The Evil God's power, eh? Yeah, Iunno, I wouldn't really call Bluke's little change to be an ascension by any means. The hell's wrong with this guy? He wants to become that kind of reason deprived *thing* of his own volition? All you can do in that kind of state is rampage about. Yeah, I don't really get him, or anyone with deviant-like tastes for that matter.

"Rynfords goal?"

"Rynford only has one goal, ultimate power!"

"Nn? Means reviving Evil God?"

My thoughts were more or less the same as Fran's. I'd assumed that he wanted to revive or unseal the Evil God or something like that.

"Are you retarded? Revivin the Evil God would cause the world to end. You think we just want to die? Hell naw, you can't kill people or fuck bitches if you ain't alive."

So does that mean he's basically planning to use the Evil God's power? But how's he manage that if he's not a believer?

"Evil God's what his name says he is, a God that rules over Evil. He ain't got no qualms giving his power to sinful men like me."

Ah, makes sense. So he's okay with helping out anyone that's evil, even if they don't

worship him.

“Rynford, where?”

“He’s already moved to another one of the bases Bluke’s prepped for him.”

“Location?”

“Hahahahaha! You want to know where it is? I’ll tell you where it is. It’s beside the Lord’s manor, right in the center of town. It’s the perfect place for Rynford to channel his magic through the whole ass city of Barbra!”

You know, he sure is being awfully cooperative. Is he retarded or something?

The moment the thought crossed my mind was the moment the ring on his finger broke whilst giving off a pale glow; Luzerio almost seemed to disappear.

“Gyahahaha! Looks like you let your guard down, brat!”

He reappeared about ten meters away from us. It looked like the ring he’d just used had the ability to be sacrificed in order to allow him to teleport a short distance. After teleporting, the man let loose a painfully loud laugh while pulling out a small container and draining its contents in an instant.

“Y’know why I was willing to talk? S’cause you’ll be dying right here, right now anyways!”

His words were accompanied by the emission of a black aura. He’d entered the same state Bluke had just a bit earlier.

Appraising him led me to observe that he had gained the Enraged status. I was more or less completely certain that the stuff he’d just downed had been some of Rynford’s custom made, magic-infused water. In other words, he’d chosen to turn himself into an evil human. It seemed he really did regard it as some sort of ascension.

The flesh around where his leg was severed even started to bubble as it readied itself to regenerate.

“I’m going to tear you to fucking pieagughgh!”

Annnd denied.

I'd started chanting Short Jump the moment he teleported away. We'd already seen what happened with Bluke, so we didn't bother letting him do as he pleased. This wasn't an anime, and there weren't any awesome special effects that accompanied his transformation, so there wasn't really any point in watching him as it completed.

Fran firmly grabbed ahold of his jaw the moment she blinked towards him, and held it in such a manner that his mouth stayed open. If she wanted, she probably could've just put a bit more strength into her hand and crushed it, but instead, she slammed him into the ground.

"Drink."

"Gurajksdhgkju8asudghask"

She activated her dimensional storage, and opened it up right in front of her palm in order to force him to drink the Water of Recovery. He wasn't able to close his mouth or spit it back out, and thus, he ended up ingesting a bunch of it.

"Gaaahhh! Gahahhhhh! Greruaughhg!"

Both his abnormal statuses disappeared; feeling the power drain from his body caused Luzerio to look up at Fran with a surprised, blank expression.

"The fuck... did you do to me!?"

"Fixed status abnormality."

"N-No way. No fucking way! W-W-W-What happened to all that overflowing power!? My power!? Fuuuuuuckkkkk!!! I'm going to fucking murder you, you fucking shi-!"

"Hmph."

Fran threw a textbook worthy right hook and caught him smack in the jaw. Luzerio immediately toppled over, likely as a result of a concussion.

"Shut up."

It looked like his shouts had been hurting her eardrums because of how excessively loud they'd been.

[Well, that works I guess.]

What now though? He knew quite a bit, so, we were glad we managed to take him alive, but we were split between dragging him along with us and handing him over to the guards. Luckily, our thoughts were interrupted by a series of rushed footsteps coming from behind us.

“Are you alright?”

The chief guard greeted us as he approached. His timing was impeccable; we quickly handed off both the guy and all the information we got from him.

Or wait, no, hold up. Luzerio was way stronger than the soldiers, so leaving him as is was probably not the best idea.

“Wah!”

I cut off Luzerio's remaining leg with a quick wind spell. He probably wouldn't be able to put up a fight with both legs missing, so that was fine I guess. We quickly sealed the wound by healing him, so the only problem was that he'd woken up again as a result of the pain, a problem Fran quickly solved by giving him another concussion.

The chief had let out a bit of cry in response to our actions, which... wasn't exactly what I'd call favourable. To him, it'd looked as if Fran had been the one to commit all the aforementioned acts of cruelty.

(Don't mind. Would've done if Master didn't.)

Yeah, I guess it's a bit too late for me to be worrying about that kinda stuff, seeing as how we'd already scared them earlier anyway.

(Nn. More important. Advance.)

[Yeah, true. We should be focusing on that instead.]

Especially seeing as how we figured out where Rynford went.

Advancing through the underground path ultimately led us to a garden in what looked like an abandoned estate in the noble's district. I'd hoped that we'd end up right inside the hideout, but unfortunately, things didn't always go that well. The place we were right now wasn't *right* next to the Lord's manor, in fact, it was a decent distance away, but you could see the city's centerpoint if you tried.

[Alright, let's do this.]

"Nn."

"Woof?"

[What is it boy?]

"Woof woof woof!"

Urushi looked like he wanted to head in a direction opposite that of the Lord's manor.

[Is that where your nose is telling you Zerais is?]

"Woof!"

So does that mean Zerais and Rynford split up so they could each do their own thing? Or was the hideout Luzerio talked about fake all along? He wasn't lying, but he could've ultimately been fed false info just so he could function as a sacrificial pawn when caught.

[Hmm... What do... Do we trust what Luzerio told us, or go after Zerais...?]

In this sort of situation, it'd probably be best for us to pursue the path that led to the greatest degree of certainty. We could always track Zerais down whenever because of Urushi's nose, so there wasn't any harm in giving Rynford's supposed facts a quick check or two.

[Let's head into the noble's district for now. We'll hunt Rynford down first.]

"Nn. Got it."

“Woof.”

Urushi used Air Jump in order to allow us to make a beeline for the Lord’s manor. Looking down allowed us to see the knights as they ran around the city doing everything they needed to; it looked like Dannan had actually managed to get his job done.

An ear splitting scream soon interrupted our travels; looking down caused us to see a woman being assaulted by what almost looked like a buff, black skinned Daruma, an Evil Human. ^[1]

We were in a rush, but not so much of one that we’d leave victims to their fates.

“Urushi.”

“Woof!”

Urushi dove straight at the Evil Human and allowed Fran to slash at its neck as she passed it by.

But it didn’t die. Its head remained unsevered.

“Gruruooooohhhh!”

It’d actually managed to realize that we were coming, so it’d raised its arms and sacrificed them to save its life.

General Information

Species: Evil Human (Evil Being)
Level: 1
Status Condition: Insane, Rampaging.
HP: 227
MP: 110
STR: 107
VIT: 117

AGI: 66
INT: 36

MGC: 77

DEX: 55

Skills

Intimidation: Lv 4

Presence Detection: Lv 3

Sword Arts: Lv 4

Martial Arts: Lv 3

Night Vision

Innate Skills

Evil Arts: Lv 2

Titles

Servant to the Evil God

Equipment

Steel Longsword

Description: Unknown

Huh, this one's pretty strong. Did it used to be an adventurer or something? It looked like it even still had some of its old skills. In other words, my suspicions were spot on, the stronger the human, the stronger the resulting Evil Human.

Hmmm... That said, I do feel like I've seen the guy somewhere before. Where was it again...?

(Adventurer. Kicked up fuss at stall.)

[Oh, right! Yeah, I remember him now.]

He'd caused some trouble at our stall, so Colbert had kicked his ass. He used to be... an F ranker, but now he'd become as strong as a D ranker. Wow. That transformation really did some work.

Still though, we didn't really have any trouble dealing him; Fran's second strike split him right down the middle. Blood and other bodily fluids splurged from his muscled corpse as it fell apart from the seams.

"Hiiiiiihfff!"

The woman we saved had gone pale because the demonic-looking corpse had fallen right in front her, but she somehow managed to squeeze out a word of thanks.

“T-Thank you very much f-for saving my life.”

Crap... What now? We couldn't really just leave her here, there might be more Evil Humans about.

“Nn.”

“Huh? Kyaah!”

“Bear with it. Just a little.”

Fran lifted her up and hopped on top of Urushi's back before immediately having him accelerate to where we saw the knights. The woman began to scream, but we couldn't really blame her.

“Kyaaaaahhhhhh!!!!”

I mean, who wouldn't scream if a three meter tall wolf popped up in front of them and started carrying them off at super high speed?

“Kyaaaaahhhhhh!!!!”

Hopefully, this wouldn't end up leaving her with any sort of trauma. Hopefully.

[1] Darumas (Dharmas) are basically fat dolls with faces on them. Daruma dolls are modeled after the guy that started the whole Shaolin kung fu shit, and they're supposed to represent good luck. Another thing is that they're commonly used as gifts. Image below.



CHAPTER 125

RYNFORD

“Very well, we shall take the lady into our care.”

“Nn.”

“We thank you for your services.”

“Thank you so much Fran! You saved my life!”

“Nn. Bye.”

“Take care of yourself out there!”

The woman we helped was much more composed now than she'd been just five minutes prior. Having Urushi leap through the sky with her on his back ended up delivering to her a bit too much of a shock, so we'd descended instead. In spite of that, the atmosphere had ended up being a bit weird throughout the trip's duration. She ended up tightly clinging to his fur, and continued to do so until it had finally come time for us to part.

We ended up having the knights tell us a bit about everything they knew as we dropped her off. It seemed that the whole situation had actually turned into quite the big deal. A bunch of pretty important places were already under attack. We had to hit the gas if we wanted to get everything under control.

[I think I see it.]

“There?”

We positioned ourselves above the Lord's manor and surveyed its surroundings.

The Lord's property was vast. It contained ten different mansions, but in spite of that, we were immediately able to distinguish our target from its peers. The atmosphere around the building in question seemed much heavier than any other around it. We

felt a powerful aura from it, one that was quite similar to that of the Evil Beings we'd recently defeated. It was dark, and clearly wicked in nature. That, however, was where the similarities ended. The aura before us was on a completely different scale. It was so powerful that staring at the building from which it came seemed to have started to give me goosebumps in spite of the distance between it and us.

Both Fran and Urushi started the place down, scowls plastered all over their faces.

[That's definitely it.]

"Nn."

I was honestly kind of tempted to just go charging in through the front door, but we knew far too little about our enemies for that to work, so we fell back on our usual stealth-based tactics.

We minimized our presences as we descended into the mansion's garden. The place lacked any sort of barrier, so infiltration turned out to be rather simple.

[We'll do the usual and whittle their numbers down bit by bit.]

"Nn."

"Woof."

We started by circling around the place so we could scout out the number of enemies we'd have to take down.

The process took around ten minutes, and informed us of the fact that the building didn't actually contain that many people. Moreover, all ten or so individuals we detected had gathered at the building's centermost area.

That, however, was all we could figure out. It didn't look like we had any other choice but to break in to the mansion's premises in order to get a bit of a better grasp of what was going on.

Oh well, whatever works, I guess.

[Get yourselves ready for combat. A fight could start at any time now.]

“Nn.”

“Woof.”

I had Fran and Urushi each down a Mana Potion in order to top off their magical energy levels. Fran ended up wielding Deathgaze over me this time around, as I was getting myself ready to shoot off a telekinetic catapult if need be.

And so, we entered the building. Apparently, no one noticed us break through its back door.

We held our breaths as we slowly moved towards the place from which we were detecting the building’s temporary inhabitants. The air seemed to be pumped full of mana, it was almost like we’d entered a haunt. Chances were, the change in atmosphere was one caused by some sort of magic item.

Not a single enemy attacked us on our way. We arrived at our destination with so little trouble that I honestly ended up feeling more disappointed than anything.

(Master. Door.)

[Yeah. It looks like all our enemies are on the other side of it.]

I could feel our enemies from beyond the large double doors before us. It seemed that the other side contained some sort of hall-like structure. The proximity we had to our foes led us to analyze them in more detail. Said process of feeling out their magical energies led us to the definite conclusion that what awaited us was a group of Evil Humans.

Recognizing our foes but led to a single question: what now? They hadn’t bothered to put themselves on guard. In other words, they were extremely confident in their own prowess. Hence, I didn’t barge in immediately. It went without saying that I strongly preferred avoiding any choices that could potentially lead to us waltzing in on a bunch of ridiculously strong foes far out of our league.

Our enemy was capable enough to make people like Zerrosreed and Luzerio into his subordinates. It was very plausible for him to have a bunch of other C or D ranked minions at his disposal. We’d end up in quite the bad spot if we were attacked by a

large group of transformed humans formerly of such a caliber. I didn't think we'd win unless we managed to catch them off guard and blast them all with a bunch of full powered spells at once.

However, I doubted that such a strategy would allow us to capture Rynford alive, especially if we were going all out. I really did want to get a hold of him without actually murdering him for information's sake though... I mean, we could always just attack everywhere except for where he was. Would that work, or...?

(What now?)

(Woof?)

Nah, scratch that. It was possible for Fran and Urushi to end up sustaining major, and potentially even irreparable injuries if we tried to hold back. Their safety was my number one priority. There was no way in hell I was going to bet their lives for the sake of keeping some shitty old geezer away from his grave. Besides, leaving him alive might end up completely screwing us over if we messed up. It was not only possible, but likely for him to try to destroy the city immediately, should he escape our grasp.

[Alright, let's get in there and hit everyone with everything we've got.]

(Certain?)

[Yeah. We don't even know whether that Rynford guy's really here or not to begin with, and he might end up getting away even if he is here, so we'd best finish him off before he messes even more shit up.]

Sorry Rynford, but you're a dead man.

[Anyways, let's get a move on.]

(Nn.)

(Growl!)

The room shook as Fran kicked down its door and started firing off her spells. Only after we started attacking did I look around in order to ensure that all our targets were in fact Evil Humans — which, fortunately, they were, especially seeing as how we

couldn't actually stop the attacks we'd already launched.

[Exploding Flare! Hazardous Gale! Exploding Flare!]

I felt a vague bit of nostalgia as I cranked out a series of full powered blasts for the first time in a long while; I overboosted my attacks whilst using Parallel Processing and Sorcery in order to bombard an incredibly large area without much delay.

The Level 4 Flame Spell, Exploding Flare, was one that incinerated a massive area. The use of a wind spell allowed us to increase the size of its explosions even further.

"Fire Wall!"

"Groooowl!"

[Stone Wall!]

I'd used the combination at too close a range, so we ended up getting hit by a bit of the resulting hot air, but Fran managed to get out unscathed by using the defensive spells she'd chanted in advance. Exploding Flare was ridiculously powerful; its aftermath seemed equivalent to that of a napalm blast's. Both sides of the room had its walls get completely blown away. Even we felt like we were about to get sent flying despite the three layers of protection we had.

[Did we end up going overboard?]

"Better than opposite."

"Woof."

The building's second floor was basically completely gone by the time the explosions finally settled down. The first had ended up half collapsed as well. Of all the areas encompassed by our strikes, the most damaged was obviously the hall in which the Evil Humans had been gathered up in. All four of its walls had been completely obliterated. Its newfound, exposed appearance almost made me think that the place was instead supposed to have been a courtyard, the courtyard of a building that took up the Lord's entire Marquis-sized property, that is.

"That's quite the way to treat someone you've never met before, girlie."

“Who?!”

“Fufufu... Are you not aware of my identity?”

“Master of Evil Arts. Rynford.”

“Right you are.”

General Information

Name: Rynford Lorentia

Age: 100

Race: Evil Being

Class: Master of Evil Arts

State: Normal

Status Level: 58/99

HP: 229

MP: 850

STR: 127

VIT: 97

AGI: 120

INT: 236

MGC: 552

DEX: 81

Skills

Chant Shortening: Lv 4

Appraisal: Lv 7

High Speed Regeneration: Lv 6

Evil Detection: Lv 9

Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 4

Agitation: Lv 4

Compounding: Lv 6

Knowledge of Poisons: Lv 7

Magic Manipulation

Greater Magic Boost

Innate Skills

Evil Arts: Lv 7

Evil God's Favour

Titles

Evil God's Vanguard

Equipment

Demonic Bone Staff

Evil Dogman's Robe

Evil Dogman's Mantle

Evil Art's Bracelet.

"Hmm... Your status and demonstrated abilities seem a bit disparate. Were you using some sort of magic item?"

Holy shit. He's completely unharmed even after all that? Luckily, he was the only one in such a state. Seven Evil Humans were piled up in front of the short, aging man. The three in front had basically been completely obliterated; little was left of their corpses. The four in the back were a bit better off, but they still looked somewhere in the medium to well done range.

Three more Evil Humans lay behind the corpse pile. They ended up taking a bit less damage because they'd used their allies as meat shields, but, they weren't exactly what you'd call in a decent state either. One was going to die in a minute or so regardless of what was done to him. The other two could potentially be saved were they to be treated, potentially being the key word.

Rynford had clearly used his subordinates as to defend against our bombardment. I'd assumed that they were capable of nothing more than just running amok on a sort of rampage, but it seemed that he could order them around somehow. Well, I guess that did make sense seeing as how he was a Master of Evil Arts.

Or, so I thought, but apparently I was wrong.

"M-Master Rynford! Please retreat!"

"We'll hold them off!"

Much to my surprise, the Evil Humans were speaking much in the same manner as well... regular humans.

I quickly appraised them, only to discover that they were quite different from all the other members of their species that we'd run into thus far. First and foremost was the

fact that they actually had their own names. They also weren't affected by any of the status conditions shared by their peers. Last but not least was the fact that their titles claimed them to be the Evil God's servants as opposed to his slaves.

So in other words, they managed to become Evil Humans whilst also retaining their sanity?

"Those. Can speak?"

"I guess you ran into some other Evil Humans in town then. The men here are unlike the mongrels thrashing about within the city's confines. They became Evil Humans by seeking out our Lord's, the Evil God's, grace on their own accord."

Oh, I get it now. So it really was the title that differentiated the two types. The slaves were the ones that'd been forced into a transformation whilst also being deprived of their reason, whereas the servants were the ones that accepted the Evil God's power as their own.

Luzerio had a title saying he was a Servant to the Evil God, so he probably would've retained his sanity as well then. Whew, thank God we got rid of him before he actually finished transforming.

"Conditions for transformation?"

"Normally, I would have asked why you'd assume that I'd tell you that, but I might as well provide you a reward for making it all the way here."

"Enough with superfluous speech."

"How assertive you are for a mere girl, but fine. It is actually very easy for anyone to evolve into an Evil Being if they so wish it. All one must do is drink the Evil God's Magical Water that I happen to be able to create. After that, all that must be done is for me give them a little bit of a push. That's it. Simple, right?"

Very simple. Too simple, in fact. Is that seriously all it takes for a human to turn into some sort of Evil Being? There would probably be more of them if that were really the case. I'm pretty sure Rynford isn't the only Master of Evil Arts out there, so if it really were that easy, then there would at least be a bit more awareness of the topic. That, however, didn't seem to be case given the fact that neither Rhodas nor Dannan seemed

to know much about the phenomenon at all. In other words, the concept of Evil Beings wasn't actually all that wide spread. It simply couldn't have been. Hence, transformation just had to have some sort of additional condition attached to it. There was no way it was actually just that simple.

Rynford was hiding something, and that something was probably related to why he was here in the first place.

What was it that Luzerio said again? Something about pouring magical energy into the city's center so it could spread throughout its entirety? What exactly does pouring magical energy into the city do?

I looked at the area behind Rynford, only to see something that made me feel a bit... off. It was quite difficult to spot at first glance, but he'd drawn a magic circle onto the floor.

Through the use of the Sorcery skill, I managed to trace its energy flow. It seemed to be taking in Rynford's evil-tainted magical energy and dispersing it. In other words, it was doing exactly as Luzerio described, it was spreading his magical energy throughout the city. The manner in which it was placed made the whole thing almost seem like a ritual of sort, and said ritual was probably that whole last push that Rynford had mentioned earlier.

"Your little display was quite interesting, girl. How about it? Would you like to subordinate yourself to me? I'll grant far more power than you have now."

"Your goal...?"

"Wonderful, what a quick reply! I see that you're still acting quite prudent, but that's a good thing in and of itself. Very well, I will tell you my goal. My goal is to revive our saviour, The Evil God, and obliterate all that this world has to offer!"

"!!"

"Is probably what you'd think, right?"

Rynford went on to repeat basically exactly what Luzerio had said. His goal was not to revive the Evil God, but instead, to spread its divine might throughout the land.

He had no interest in any goals stemming from sources akin to excessive religious zealotry; he didn't intend on destroying the world or plunging all its citizens into despair for the sake of his God's glory.

"Well? How about it? I will give you all the power you seek if you choose the path of subordination. I can even provide you an evolution, though it will be one that slightly deviates from the norm."

"Nn. Declined. Won't become subordinate."

"Are you sure? You willfully turn down evolution despite being a member of the black cat tribe, the tribe whose members are said to be unable to naturally evolve?"

"Nn? Demand explanation."

"I recall hearing that your tribe was long abandoned by God, and thus, lost its ability to evolve. I can't speak for the claim's authenticity, but that's what they say."

"..."

"I've the ability to allow you an evolution, and an immediate one, at that."

Rynford offered Fran one of his old, wrinkled hands as a wide grin spread itself across his face.

CHAPTER 126

TEMPLE

“I’ve the ability to allow you an evolution, and an immediate one, at that.”

[It’d probably be a good idea for us to play along a bit in order to get him to tell us a bit more.]

The Principality of Falsehood would allow us the ability to discern the truth from lies, so listening to him a bit longer wouldn’t really result in any sort of harm. That said, his comment regarding the Black Cat Tribe’s ability to evolve meant that evolving as a Black Catsman probably had some sort of trick to it. This was a chance for us to learn a bit more about the process, so, the risk was well worth it, at least in my eyes.

(Information already sufficient. His evolution not true evolution. Involves transformation into Evil Being.)

[True.]

(Won’t lower head to man like this. Not even as act.)

[Ah, I getcha.]

Alright, yeah. Fran’s choice was definitely the better of the two choices. Rynford thought his words to be the truth, but there was no way for us to determine the correctness of the information he provided. Not everything he thought to be true really would be true, after all. Moreover, we had no idea what he’d end up doing should we show him some sort of opening. Playing along wasn’t exactly what you could call perfectly safe.

“Nn. Can just force information from him later.”

Fran pulled tightened her grip on me as she got herself into a combat ready stance.

“Oh? So you choose not to obey? Fine. I’ll just defeat you and force you into a transformation.”

“Impossible.”

“Fuofuofuofuo! Your words appear much sharper than your skills. I assume you possess some sort of trump card, but I assure you that the magic tool you just used will be insufficient if you wish to defeat me.”

Ah, right, he had Appraisal. He must’ve seen Fran’s fake stats, and thought her to be far too weak to defeat him. He’d likely feel different if he ended up seeing her real stats. I guess that was technically the whole point of using the skill in the first place though, so yeah.

[Welp, his fault, not ours.]

I activated my telekinetic catapult and launched myself right at him. There were only ten meters between us, so my flight but lasted for an instant.

But I was unable to impale the old man.

“That’s a formidable magic sword you have there. Still, it lacks the power needed to pierce the divine protection bestowed upon me by the Evil God himself.”

I was stopped and sent flying by some sort of ridiculously powerful protective barrier. I hadn’t gone all out because I didn’t use Overboost, but I hadn’t really held back either. He’d actually managed to block an attack that made use of element enhancements, Poison Fang, and Vibration Blade.

Shit. I ended flying a bit too far. There was quite a bit of distance between Fran and I.

(Master, Urushi. Stay at current location.)

[Alright. I’ll sit around and peek at his skills to see if I can figure anything out.]

(Nn.)

(Woof.)

“How close. You would have been able to interrupt the ritual had you killed me with that blow. That said, delaying its completion for another ten minutes would be all your

interruption would've managed, for not even my death can stop the gears I've set into motion!"

"Ritual?"

"Fuofuofuofuo! It doesn't matter how much information you pry from me! It's far too late! The ritual has already reached a state of completion!."

The magic circle Rynford had hidden behind him began to shine with a blindingly bright light the moment he made his declaration. Magical power started flooding out from within it and scattering into our surroundings.

"With this, the city will give rise to an additional 330 of the Evil God's Slaves! I'd originally planned for a number ten times that, but, all is fine. Zerais' plans will more than compensate for what we lack."

I knew he was using that magic circle for something! That said, I was too late to do anything about it. He'd already used it to transform everyone he could into Evil Humans.

"And with that, I'll be taking my leave."

"Wait!"

Fran whipped Deathgaze at the old man, but it ended up getting repelled.

"Fuofuofuo. What a weak throw. I see that I was correct in assuming that most of your abilities stemmed from the sword you had. Well, I don't quite care either way. Men, apprehend her. Kill her if she resists."

"Yessir."

The two remaining Evil Humans had somehow managed to recover from their critical injuries. Both now semi-healthy specimens turned towards Fran after acknowledging their master's orders.

"Don't be struggling now, if you want to live that is."

"Dedicate yourself to Master Rynford's service."

“I am inclined to forgive you if you do as any good girl and beg for your life.”

They were looking down on us, which did make sense given that we’d disguised Fran’s stats in order for her to seem like any other D ranked adventurer. Numerically speaking, she appeared to Rynford as someone far inferior to both of the Evil Humans before her.

“Absolute refusal.”

“Then die. Farewell, girlie.”

Rynford disappeared as he finished making that one last statement. Shit! Did he teleport somewhere? Evil Arts users could do that? God fucking damn it! I can’t believe he actually managed to get away!

“Prepare to die, brat!”

“We’ll have you pay for wronging Master Rynford!”

Their words were accompanied by a series of twisting expressions, not out of cruelty, but because Fran had killed one of them in an instant.

“T-That’s impossible! Where the hell did that sword come from!?”

The answer was obvious, the weapon she now held in her hands was one she’d procured from her dimensional storage. Specifically, she’d pulled out a blade that hadn’t seen much use in quite a while, the magic sword Phantom Pyroxene.

Rynford’s other minion was also disposed of in an instant. There wasn’t any trading of blows. The events that transpired failed to amount to anything that even possibly be considered a battle. Fran had simply eliminated her foes. That was it. Her advantage over them was clear, she surpassed them both numerically, and in terms of the number and overall quality of her skills. Her superiority, combined with the fact that her opponents had been off guard, had allowed her to slay them without so much as batting an eyelash.

[It’d probably be a good idea for you to get rid of the magic circle too.]

“Nn. Got it.”

Rynford had mentioned something about Zerais, so chances were, the two were in the midst of joining up. In other words, Urushi would be able to track both of them down for us at once.

We left the building after casting a few spells to blow the magic circle up. Barbra was bustling with noise as a result of the old man’s actions. Screams were coming from all over the city. The port was giving off a bright red glow; it had obviously been set aflame, a result that almost seemed natural given that three hundred odd Evil Humans had been let loose.

There simply wasn’t enough time for us to fix everything ourselves. We had no choice but to hope that the knights would succeed in the completion of their duties.

[Let’s chase Rynford down.]

“Nn.”

“Woof woof!”

Again, that didn’t mean we ignored everything and just singlemindedly charged towards our destination. We still stopped to eliminate whatever enemies we happened to encounter on our way there. All the aforementioned enemies had ended up being forced into their transformations, and so not a single one of them had managed to retain a sane state of mind.

Seeing the Evil Human’s rampaging about had honestly made us feel a bit hesitant about leaving most of them as is, but Rynford and Zerais were probably plotting something to make this whole ordeal even worse than it already was, so we still ended choosing to pursue them instead.

[Take the route that’ll get us to where Zeras and Rynford are fastest.]

“Woof!”

We managed to reach the source of Rynford’s scent about twenty odd minutes later. The trip had resulted in us butchering three additional Evil Humans along the way.

[You sure it's here?]

“Woof.”

There didn't seem to be much magical energy leaking from the building's premises, and we weren't able to sense any presences inside of it either. But I trusted Urushi's nose. If he said that this was the place, then it probably was.

[Why a temple of all places?]

The place that Urushi had led us to was, without a doubt, a place of worship, a house of God.

This world's religious practice wasn't one segregated by different sects or cults. Every single temple was dedicated to every single God. People of certain races and occupations might end up having greater dedication to one God than the rest, but it'd never be by a large margin.

All in all, the church was a simple, powerless organisation. It never named any particular popes or pontiffs. This was the result of the people believing it forbidden to use the Gods' names in self interest. It was said that anyone that did commit such a taboo would soon meet fate in the form of death. That, to me, seemed like nothing but just another urban legend, however, this world's denizens apparently believed it to be true. I couldn't help but feel as if applying such an axiom to the religious organisations we had back on Earth would result in about eighty percent of their staff getting wiped out.

There was a sort of Priest-like position, but it wasn't anything special. Priests were just responsible for managing their temples, and that was it. Anyone could become a priest so long as they had the Oracle skill.

Job classes could actually be considered one of the Gods' blessings, and thus, one could change their job at any given temple simply by offering a prayer. Each prayer would come with a three thousand Golde fee in order for the temple to pay its maintenance costs and keep its priests out of poverty.

One could also change jobs at the Adventurer's Guild, as Fran had done twice already in the past. The reason for that was because the guild possessed a magic item that happened to have said ability. I'd assumed that said item was considered a blasphemy

or something, but apparently, all the second hand information I'd obtained said that it wasn't.

Anyways, enough digressing. All that aside, a temple was still a temple. It only made sense for the Gods' Divine Protection to prevent anything less than desirable from entering its grounds.

So, given that, how the hell did Rynford managed to worm his way inside? The guy was totally connected to the Evil God. No doubts there whatsoever.

[Just what the hell is going on here...?]

"Will know once inside."

"Woof!"

[T-True, I guess...]

We killed our presences as we approached the building. There weren't any back doors, and the windows were too small to climb through, even for Fran. They'd only been constructed for the sake of letting light into the building's interior.

Peeking through the windows didn't reward us with any clues either. That said, we did manage to sense a slight bit of magical energy.

[I can feel a blatant evil energy in this magic, so it's gotta be him... But still, why the temple?]

We'd never entered any temples ourselves, but we'd passed by a few on occasion. The magic that we'd felt on all those occasions had been pure. What we were feeling here was far too sinister to be of the same make.

Looks like we're going to have to break in, I guess...

[Alright... Let's go.]

We steeled ourselves as we gave the door a gentle push and got ready to make our way inside.

CHAPTER 127

A BATTLE WITHIN THE TEMPLE

We steeled ourselves as we gave the temple's door a gentle push and got ready to make our way inside.

(Person sighted.)

Peeking through the resulting crevice allowed our eyes to catch a figure within the building's deepest depths. The temple was dark, but we were able to make out the small framed individual regardless.

[Yup, that's definitely Rynford.]

(Woof woof!)

He'd yet to notice us. The old man had probably never in his wildest dreams imagined that we would be so quick in chasing him down. It looked like we were going to be able to blindside him again, but we were going to have to mix up our method of attack. The whole fire and wind based thing we had going earlier was a fairly solid tactic, but it wasn't applicable given the strength of his protective barrier. I also held the sneaking suspicion that destroying the temple wasn't exactly the best course of action. The Gods probably wouldn't be so happy with us if we did. There was a chance that they might not consider Rynford's evil deeds as something of enough note to counterbalance completely blowing up one of their places of worship.

That said though, we couldn't just wait for him to leave or anything. Who knew what he'd do if left to his own devices?

Besides, our eyes had managed to catch themselves a little something of interest.

[Those crystal thingies he's got are looking pretty suspicious.]

(Nn. Definitely of value.)

Three massive crystals sat around Rynford, each giving off an evil, bluish purple glow.

They were probably why the temple's energies seemed so off and misaligned.

[You two focus on the crystals. I'll get Rynford.]

(Got it.)

(Bork!)

(Master.)

[What's up?]

(No holding back. Will kill him. Here and now.)

[You sure? He might be able to give you some info on evolution.]

(I'm sure. Master promised, will make me evolve. So, will definitely evolve some day. Won't need to rely on information from him.)

Right. I did tell her that when we first met. I'm glad she remembers, and that she trusts me so much... I-It's not like I'm moved or anything! Whatever! Who cares! Either way, my motivation's hit its peak.

[Yeah, you're right. I'll definitely make sure you evolve.]

(Nn.)

(Woof woof!)

[See, even Urushi says he'll help you out.]

(Thanks.)

(Ruff!)

[So yeah, let's do this. Short Jump!]

I teleported myself above Rynford, charged up my Telekinetic Catapult and launched myself towards him.

“Nuasdhf!? What the!?”

I had totally just rammed him from his blind spot, and his surprised reaction gave way to the fact that he hadn't picked up on the attack in advance. In other words, his barrier was the automatic type.

“You again, girl!? How did you manage to...”

Rynford had started shouting at Fran out of surprise, but both she and Urushi ignored him and went straight for the massive ass crystals.

“Shit! What's with this damn sword!? It's keeping me from moving!”

Oh? Did I just hear what I thought I heard? So he can't move while his barrier's out? Good to know, good to know.

I continued to use Telekinesis to push myself against his barrier in order to stop both myself from flying away and him from moving. The act was even draining his mana as a bit of an added bonus.

“Evil Smash!”

Rynford fired a spell in Fran and Urushi's direction. Surprisingly, it passed right through his barrier. Holy crap though, that barrier was hella amazing. It activated on its own, was strong enough to repel my Telekinetic Catapult, and even allowed attacks that came from inside of it to fly out. Not being able to move was honestly pretty fair as far as compensation went.

The old man had fired thirty odd projectiles in the pair's direction, but neither of the two had gotten hit. There was simply no way in hell either Fran or Urushi would be hit by something as telegraphed as a clump of magic flying in a straight line. As the attack had failed to put any pressure on them, both my companions soon began unloading on Rynford's magic crystals.

“Stop that!”

Claw, fang, blade and spell assaulted the mineral-like objects and sent them flying all over, and so, despite the fact that they'd been reinforced, they cracked. They'd probably break if hit a few more times.

“Will you stop that already? Shit! I have no choice but to first focus on getting rid of this damn sword!”

Yeah, I figured that’s what he’d end up deciding on, but yeah no. Not happening.

[Burst Flame!]

I purposefully backed off a bit before casting a fire spell a few times. The spell was actually quite weak, but, it would light the target’s surroundings on fire and keep the flames lit for ten odd seconds.

[Burst Flame!]

[Burst Flame!]

Burst Flame was the perfect skill for this situation. It was weak, but I could pretty much spam it to force him to keep his barrier up. Better yet was the fact that the flames obscured his vision and prevented him from tracking me down. As a result, he pretty much ended up being stuck randomly misfiring his attacks.

“Haaaaah!”

“Growl growl!”

The crystals were ultimately unable to endure Fran and Urushi’s endless assault, and hence, one soon crumbled.

Oh sweet! The whole evil atmosphere has cleared up quite a bit! Looks like the crystals were what’d been causing it in the first place.

“How... dare you!”

“Hehe. Victory.”

“Woof!”

Rynford seemed to understand that one of the crystals had been destroyed despite not having any vision of it, for he let loose a hate filled groan. I couldn’t help but want to

smirk as I realized that our strategy had been extraordinarily effective.

“The path will close if she destroys another crystal... It looks like I have no choice, but to...”

The old man suddenly turned off his barrier so he could better protect the crystals. His strategy was reasonable given Burst Flame’s relatively low power, but still, it was risky. It was a move that he wouldn’t have been able to choose had he not resolved himself for death.

Rynford dashed towards Fran, his body cloaked in a layer of flame.

“Damned girl!!!!!!”

However, I’d long predicted that this would happen. I knew he was eventually going to switch to suicide bomb mode, and so, I’d already plotted my next move in advance.

[Take this!]

I repeated the action I’d taken at the battle’s start, and teleported above him before releasing a bunch of telekinetic energy.

“Ggagargghghajh!”

Blood splurged from Rynford’s mouth as he let loose a pained scream. I had landed a direct hit, and my blade had pierced right through his torso.

The man had been split in two by the attack’s force. The angle from which I hit him had made it so that the upper portion of his body almost kind of looked like the busts you’d find at art exhibitions.

I had applied a bunch of telekinetic force in order to hit the brakes the moment after I collided with Rynford, and so, I had luckily managed to avoid giving the floor anything more than just the slightest nick.

Technically, I had caused a bit of damage earlier as well. I tried to stop Burst Explosion’s flames from spreading, but, I had ultimately ended up leaving the floor a bit scorched. Just a bit though! The Gods won’t mind. I mean, I’m working against the Evil God’s followers here, so they shouldn’t, right? Right...?

I gave the sculptures in my vicinity a bit of a fearful glance, but it didn't look like they'd reacted in any which way. I guess that made sense. They hadn't even done anything to Rynford after all, and normally, you'd expect his actions would incur all sorts divine wrath and punishment, so I'm sure I'm still safe.

...

I'm really sorry. Seriously, I swear I am.

"You sons of bitches! You're not getting away with this!"

Rynford began screaming curses as I took my sweet time apologizing to the Gods above. Wait, the hell? How's he not dead? The old man should've long been turned into a corpse, but it looked like he was still just full of energy.

"I swear I'm going to fucking break that sword, put it on an altar and sacrifice it to the Evil God himself!"

We immediately tried to finish Rynford off, but he'd already deployed his defensive barrier, so our attacks were unable to reach him. Moreover, he had even begun to regenerate. It looked like he truly had long become something inhuman.

"Zerrosreed! Get the hell over here, right this instant! Summon Clan!"

Rynford had realized that he was at a disadvantage, and thus, he opted to summon one of his subordinates. I'd planned to focus fire said summon the moment it arrived, but was denied the option altogether. The sneaky old bastard had managed to cast the spell within his barrier's confines.

And of all people, he had to have summoned Zerrosreed. We'd yet to meet the guy, but I knew for fact that he would be our toughest opponent yet. He, as a human, had been powerful enough to considered as strong as a B ranked adventurer.

But now, he'd likely transformed into an Evil Human and become even more powerful. It'd probably be best for us to retreat. We couldn't match something on that level by ourselves.

Or so I thought...

“W-What!? It didn’t work? Summon Clan: Zerrosreed!”

Huh, interesting...? The spell had managed to generate a magic circle, but once again, summoned... absolutely fucking nothing.

“What the hell do you mean, he refused!? C-Could he have betrayed me!?”

Apparently, the old man and his companions had had some sort of falling out.

[Well, I guess this our chance to finish him off.]

“Nn. Will defeat here and now.”

“Growl!”

CHAPTER 128

RYNFORD: EVIL GOD'S EMBODIMENT

Rynford reacted to Zerrosreed's betrayal with a hateful shout, which, in turn provided me yet another chance to assault him with a telekinetic cata-port. ^[1]

A loud grinding noise filled the temple as I smashed into Rynford's automatic barrier. That, however, was still just the onset.

"Burst Flame."

[Burst Flame!]

"Arooooo!!"

I'd said it all haughty-like, but to be completely honest, my actions hadn't really changed much at all. I was still draining his mana and keeping him from moving by spamming a bunch of weak skills at him. His barrier would probably end up dissipating if he ran out of magical energy, so I figured it was probably the right thing to do.

"Nraaaghh! Not this shit again!"

Rynford was looking pretty desperate, so we might actually be able to finish him off if we kept this up a bit longer.

"Damn it! The Path has yet to fully open... but it simply cannot be helped. Oh great God of Evil, grant me your power!"

Orrrrr not. Well, I figured he wasn't about to just sit there till he died.

The old man started to chant, his face still twisted in rage. All the evil energy within the temple gathered around his frame.

The fuck? It almost looked like the temple was giving Rynford its power. Was it because of those crystals he had...?

Shit. Crisis Detection had kicked itself into full throttle. It was reacting just as much as it had been back when we ran into the Midgard Wurm.

[Fran! Urushi! Get out of there!]

I teleported Fran and I out immediately after confirming that Urushi had dove into the shadows. Our escape was accompanied by the sound of a large explosion. Dust and stone erupted from the temple as it collapsed.

“Gugaaaaaaa!!”

A roar echoed throughout the night, and with it came a wave of evil-aligned magical energy.

Holy crap he’s huge!

A muscly, black skinned giant, a fifteen meter tall Evil Human-like thing rose from within the temple’s rubble.

At first, I’d thought that it was something Rynford had summoned, but I was wrong.

“Get back here! You’re not escaping me, little girl!”

His shout contained such force that it almost seemed to make the air tremble.

The giant that stood before us was none other than Rynford himself, as evidenced by his mutated but still recognizable face.

General Information

Name: Rynford Lorentia

Age: 100

Race: Evil God’s Embodiment

Job: Master of Evil Arts

Status: Deified (Evil God)

Status Level: 99/99

HP: 5620

MP: 4458

STR: 2027
VIT: 1887
AGI: 598
INT: 1459
MGC: 1987
DEX: 115

Skills

Chant Shortening: Lv 7
Appraisal: Lv 7
High Speed Regeneration: Lv 6
Evil Detection: Lv 9
Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 4
Agitation: Lv 4
Compounding: Lv 6
Knowledge of Poisons: Lv 7
Magic Manipulation
Maximized Magic Boost
Maximized Strength Boost

Innate skills

Evil Arts: MAX
Evil God Arts: Lv 5
Evil God's Favour
Evil God's Cage

Titles

One Bestowed With the Evil God's Power

Equipment

None

Holy shit. He was even more powerful than the demon we'd fought back in the day. His threat level was somewhere between an A and a B, and he even possessed skills the likes of which we'd never heard of before. Engaging him without first finding ourselves some backup was pretty much equivalent to committing suicide.

[Okay, we need to get out of here.]

"Nn!"

"Woof!"

I started chanting as Fran and Urushi kicked themselves into top gear.

[Short Jump!]

The spell activated after we'd travelled about fifty meters worth of distance. It looked like Fran and I were going to be able to get away if we kept this up. Urushi had the ability to dive into the shadows and whatnot, so he'd be fine too.

That, however, was when things stopped going well.

[Gah!]

"Ow!"

"Whimper!"

Fran and I ended up colliding with what appeared to be some sort of thin wall. The same thing had happened to Urushi as well despite the fact that he was still hidden within the shadows.

"You shall not escape the Evil God's Cage, one of the new abilities with which I was blessed!"

Shit, so that's what that new skill did!? Looking around made me realize that the cage we were trapped in had been one that extended about fifty meters in every direction with Rynford at its centre.

[Inferno Burst!]

"Fire Javelin!"

I switched from spamming spells to using my Telekinetic Catapult against the barrier's outer walls.

[Shit! That didn't work either!?!]

The cage, however, remained intact. In fact, my durability had ended up going down instead. His defensive wall was even stronger than it'd been before.

[Dimension Jump!]

The next spell I tried was one that would let us teleport about a hundred meters. It was kind of finicky, but still better than Short Jump in either case.

Fuck, it's not working!? Does the barrier have some sort of anti-teleportation property!?

"Evil Flare."

If I were human, the sudden influx of evil oriented magic energy would likely have caused every single one of my body's hairs to stand on end. I felt a sense of crisis, a taste a fear. As a result, I ended up firing off the spell I'd been chanting.

[Short Jump!]

A fireball passed right through our previous location before exploding into flames. It was so powerful that it ended up hitting us despite the fact that we were a whole thirty meters away from its point of impact. Luckily, I managed to set up a magical barrier and prevent most of the damage. We would've been in a pretty bad spot if we ended up taking a direct hit from it.

"Not a bad dodge, but not good enough! Evil Barrage!"^[2]

[What the!?]

"You think you can dodge this?"

Fifty volleyball sized lumps of evil energy materialized around him and started flying at us. Each moved differently; some flew in a straight line, others moved in a more circular arc. The different movement patterns, combined with the fact that each projectile moved at its own speed, made the attack ridiculously difficult to avoid.

"Kuh!"

[Fire Shield!]

"Haaahh!"

[Wind Wall]

We defended ourselves against the spell by dodging, striking down the projectiles, blocking, and using defensive spells.

Luckily, the individual projectiles were rather weak, they didn't do that much damage. The problem lay in the fact that getting hit even a single time would lead us to flinch and thereby get hit by the rest.

Shit, what now? Let's see... we were going to have to somehow escape his barrier, which either meant we would either have to slip or break right through it.

Slipping through it seemed difficult as it stopped both space/time and darkness magic. Do I use up the rest of my points on space/time magic then? Ehh... nah, that seemed like a bad idea if anything. There was no guarantee that pointing stuff would allow us to pass through the barrier.

What if I used my points to get us a bit more brute force? I could probably shove a few into flame magic. Actually, I could probably change up my approach and go with something like purification magic instead. That'd probably be more effective given that he was classified as something evil. Probably.

Actually, we did have yet another option to fall back on if we wanted to go for pure destructive force.

(Master. Will use Latent Potential Release.)

[Wait, don't!]

Fran had hit the nail on the head. Latent Potential Release would allow us enough power to not only run away, but probably even kill him given how much stronger it'd made us during that whole Lich thing.

But I wasn't going to let her use it, absolutely not.

[I'm going to try a little something first.]

I spent six of my remaining eighteen points and maxed out space/time magic, as I

figured it seemed like the best option given the current circumstances.

〈Space/Time Magic has reached its maximum level. As a result, you have now obtained the unique skill, Dimensional Magic. Its level is currently set to 1.〉

With the unique skill came the Chronos Clock, Quick, and Slow spells, but as I couldn't really use them in the current circumstances. I instead tried to activate one of the new space/time spells we learned.

[Long Jump!]

But not even that would let us escape Rynford. We once again ended up with our faces against his barrier. It seemed that the amount of distance our teleport carried us was completely irrelevant.

The old man's projectiles quickly caught up to and swarmed us once more.

(Should use Latent Potential Release)

[Let me do it then.]

(No. Me.)

[Don't. That skill's side effects are ridiculous. You might even end up dead.]

(Still want to)

[Listen to me Fran! No means no!]

(Mrmmph.)

Our exchange was immediately followed by the situation spiraling out of control.

“Guhh!”

[Fran!]

We weren't able to avoid all the incoming projectiles; one hit Fran head on. Said projectile was immediately followed by many of its kind, and Fran was subject to

bombardment. Shit! We lost too much focus!

I immediately teleported us a short distance away and set up a magical barrier.

We managed to escape the attacks and reduce the amount of damage we took, but Rynford didn't let up. He immediately followed his attack with another.

"Evil Flare!"

"Uaaahhh!"

The old man had managed to catch onto the fact that it was very difficult for us to use short jump several times in a row, so he'd intentionally forced us to use it while also engulfing our destination in scorching hot flames. Both Fran and I immediately deployed our magical barriers at full power in response.

"Kuuaaaahhh!"

[Fuuckk!!]

Our full powered, double barrier was unable to hold against his attack, and so, we were blown about twenty meters away.

"Finally managed you catch you. Quite the pesky little fly you were."

We narrowly managed to escape death, but it wasn't too far off. I'd been pretty roughed up, but Fran was looking even worse. She was barely conscious, and her left arm had been burnt black as coal.

[Fran!]

"Ugh....."

It looked like his next attack would end up finishing us off.

[Fuck off! I'm not letting you harm another hair on Fran's head!]

I fiddled around with my status as I healed her up.

〈Chant Shortening has reached its maximum level. As a result, you have now obtained the unique skill, Chant Nullification.〉

Chant Nullification: This skill eliminates the need to chant magical invocations. Spells can now be cast simply through the recitation of their names, but at a greater mana cost.

Sweet! I'd been planning to buy time by continuously chanting short jump and teleporting around, so having this skill really helped. It gave us the ability to teleport nonstop as opposed to having to risk damage every time. I was a bit concerned about its increased mana cost, but this wasn't the time to be brooding over something like that, so whatever! Let's just do this shit!

[Short Jump!]

[Short Jump!]

[Short Jumpppp!!!]

I teleported all over the place in order to avoid Rynford's attacks and keep Fran safe.

"Argghhh!! I had suspected that you had that skill, but why is it that you can use such a difficult spell so many times in succession!? Just die already! Damn it! Die!"

Instantly casting the spell made it cost about twice as much mana, but that was honestly perfectly fine. It allowed us to spam it and escape Rynford's assault, which in turn caused him get frustrated. Hell yeah! Keep getting mad! Start messing yourself up by getting tilted!

I started looking for a way out of this situation as I teleported all over the place. If I couldn't find one, I'd probably end up having to use Latent Potential Release.

"Master...?"

[Let's see if we can try to find some sort of weak point or something.] ^[2]

We continued to dodge and dodge and dodge in order to escape his attacks, but we weren't able to inflict on him any sort of serious injury. His regenerative abilities outdid everything Fran and Urushi could output.

I tried catapulting myself at him a few times too, but even that failed. It didn't even actually inflict any major damage on him. In fact, using the telekinetic catapult ended up giving him an opportunity to counter attack us.

I made sure I at least appeared calm so Fran wouldn't end up panicking, but honestly, I'd begun feeling a bit frustrated and impatient. We were exhausting ourselves, my mana was starting to run low. I was on the verge of just saying fuck it and using Latent Potential Release.

But then it happened.

The Evil God's Cage vanished as a high pitched, clear, bell-like sound rang through our surroundings.

"W-What!?"

We had no idea what happened, but it seemed like it was something outside Rynford's expectations.

I immediately cast all my other thoughts aside and took advantage of the opportunity presented.

[Urushi, Fran, we're getting the hell out of here, right now!]

"Bark!"

[Dimension Jump!]

I hid us behind a building immediately after teleporting about a hundred meters away.

[You alright?]

"Nn... Somehow."

[Whew. Good.]

"Woof!"

“You okay too, Urushi?”

“Ruff.”

I didn’t really know how or why, but we had managed to escape. Whew!

“Nugrahhhhhhhhh!!!”

The next thing that happened left us in a state of shock. Rynford had let loose a pained scream. Not a howl, or battle cry, but a scream.

[Huh?]

We hurriedly turned around and beheld the sight before us.

[Holy shit!]

“Lots of swords.”

The evil being’s body had been filled with blades.

A large, snake-like thing had wrapped itself around him and restrained all his movements. Around him stood a small group of individuals.

One crushed Rynford’s right leg with his bare fists. Another had impaled his left with a large, knight-like spear. Some dashed along the ground as others flew through the air. But despite their differences, they were all working together towards a single goal: Rynford’s defeat.

“All really strong.”

[Y-Yeah, they are. Who the hell are they anyways?]

[1] Cata-port = Catapult + teleport.

CHAPTER 129

SIDE: COMBATANTS

Side: Forrund

People first started turning into monstrosities about an hour ago.

I already defeated approximately thirty of them, but their end was nowhere in sight. Many continued to run rampant, and we had no guarantee that people would stop turning into them. Resolving the situation required getting rid of its cause.

I headed in the direction from which I sensed the most evil energy as I continued to eliminate any monstrosities I came across.

“T-Thank you very much!”

“...”

“U-Uhm...”

“...No prob.”

I gestured at the man thanking me that there was no need for any expression of gratitude, and that he should instead focus his energies on making his escape as the area was still unsafe. But for some odd reason, he ended up apologizing to me with a pale, panicked expression before scrambling away.

I didn’t understand what had happened. I was planning on offering him an escort in order to ensure his safety, so why did he run away...?

“Haaaahh.....”

I sighed.

I never understood why, but things had always been like this. I made sure to stay quiet and expressionless, but everyone would always say that I seemed to give off an air of

intimidation. I'd never thought so myself, but apparently that's just how they saw me. It's gotten so bad that I'd actually started getting used to scaring everyone I met.

I wasn't really good at talking to people, so I tried going for gestures instead, but people were still scared me anyways. I was completely at a loss. I didn't understand how I was supposed to act.

"Can't be helped. I'll just keep looking for monstrosities instead."

I jumped atop the tallest building, some sort of four story business, and surveyed my surroundings.

The change in height granted me a much clearer view of the city.

"Hmm..."

None of the monstrosities had bothered using the night as cover. They didn't conceal their evil energies or intentions, so I was able to find one almost immediately. It was attacking a group of livestock as opposed to a human, and it was only about three hundred meters away. There was far too little distance between us for me to even consider the possibility of missing, so I decided to deal with it from where I stood.

"Pierce."

A single magic sword materialized itself in the air, abided by my will, and flew towards its target. The blade carried with it more speed than an arrow and more power than a spear. It pierced the monstrosity with ease, destroying it in a single blow. As it had fulfilled its duty, the blade no longer needed to remain, and so, it dissipated, it returned itself to the void from which it came.

The skill I used was my extra skill, Sword God's Blessing. Its ability allowed me to create copies of any magic swords I've ever touched. The only restriction the skill had was that it possessed a sort of threshold. It was unable to imitate any blade whose abilities that exceeded said threshold. For example, I had once tried imitating Ignis, the Godblade, but my reconstruction of it was to no avail.

At first, the Sword God's Blessing had only allowed me to create swords. However, honing my skills for years on end eventually allowed me to develop the ability to control them as well. Training with the skill had decreased the amount of time and

mana it took me to construct each blade. At present, I had the ability to birth and fire a hundred swords at once.

“...Target sighted.”

I managed to catch sight of another monstrosity. This time around, however, it was attacking a human, so I decided to descend and deal with the issue in person.

Questions flooded my mind as I moved my body towards its destination. I couldn't help but wonder how this event had come to be. It was far too obscure to be considered something caused by nature, as the monstrosities themselves gave off a sense of evil. They reminded me of one of the high ranking Evil Beings I'd defeated in the past.

The incidents cause simply had to be an unnatural factor. My guesses were that it was either the result of a plot or the loss of control over a sort of forbidden magic item. In either case, I would have to seek out and deal with the problem's source.

I no longer had a hometown, but Barbra may as well have been my second. I refused to let it fall, I would protect it without fail.

“Forrrund Annonnkul, taking off!”^[1]

Side: Phillip

“Steel your nerves, men! Show the world why Barbra's knights as known as the elite!”

“Sir! Yes sir!”

“By your command!”

“For honour!”

My subordinates roared in response to my provocation. They looked to be in good form.

“Move out!”

Naturally, I, as the commander, was obligated to put on a display in which my men would find no shame. I raised my spear and charged straight into the horde of monsters before me.

My father had informed me that this incident was one perpetrated by none other than my very own younger brothers. I, as their flesh and blood, had no choice but to make amends for their mistakes.

I first learned of this information just before the clock struck midnight. My father had paid me a visit in order to inform me of Bluke's plan. I was shocked by its contents, and dreaded the fate he had faced.

"Father, that simply cannot be. Are you sure that you speak the truth!?"

"I am... It is undoubtedly true... The city has already begun descending into a state of madness..."

The words that came out of my father's mouth had almost seemed like a mere delusion given his haggard state. However, even the most meagre glance at Bluke's form resulted in my realisation that my father was as correct as could be.

It was none other than my duty as a sibling to right my younger brothers' wrongs and clear the Krysten family's name of its sins. Regrettably, I must concede that our clan has betrayed the citizen's trust, thus, it was necessary for me to risk my life in combat in order to regain it.

Many of the monstrosities bore faces recognizable as those belonging to the city's nobles, likely a result of my youngest brother, Waint, marketing his goods towards an aristocratic audience. It was a nobles duty to protect the country's people, yet, the monstrosities had fallen to the point where they instead attacked them. I felt but pity for their souls. I steeled my resolve and decided that I would strike them down before they stained their hands with the people's blood.

I knew not whether they rejoiced upon being felled by the blade of my spear. However, I felt it a necessary purge, for I bore no remorse in slaying a noble capable of casting the citizens' lives away for the sake of preserving their own hide.

"Buaaaahhhhhh!"

“Screeeeech!”

But even then, I sympathized with the fates that had befallen them.

“Oh Magical Lance, Granbolt, demonstrate your abilities! Fell all foes of mine!”

My beloved spear gave off a brilliant shine as it consumed my mana to viel itself in a coat of lightning.

“Penetrating Charge!”

The technique pierced through the throats of two different monstrosities as Granbolt electrocuted and paralyzed my foes.

“By my order, waste not this opportunity! Slay our enemies!”

My men made use of the opportunity I had created for them. They charged straight towards the monstrosities and sent them to their graves. Our coordination had allowed us to clear an entire area of them in but a single swoop.

“The coast is clear, we shall move onto the citizen’s residential district. If you bear any wounds or complaints, raise your voices now or risk losing the opportunity.”

“Sir! We’re ready to march!”

My subordinates responded with shouts full of vigour.

“Very well, we shall split into two squadrons. Divide yourselves into five man units. Scatter throughout the district and eliminate any monstrosities you cross. I shall work alone. Many a task requires my attention.”

“Sir! Yes sir! Orders acknowledged sir!”

“Forget not that not all our foes will immediately fall before us. Many powerful beings lie within their ranks.”

“We will sir. You take care of yourself too.”

It has come time for me to locate the incident’s mastermind.

Ten minutes passed as I scoured the city for villains. It was then that I witnessed it. A manor in close proximity to my own had bursted into flame.

Side: Zerrosreed

[What is the meaning of this!? Have you betrayed me, Zerrosreed!?]

Shut the fuck up! I'm having fun here you old shit!

"Dorahhhhh!!!"

"Gugyaagaaaa!"

"Hahahahahahaha! That's what I'm talking about! And he was just a D ranker before transforming too!"

"Gyooohh!"

I was fighting one of the guys Rynford turned into an Evil Being just cause he happened to catch my eye.

Guy was an experienced D ranked adventurer, and a strong one at that. Hahahaha! Just crossing swords with him has got my blood boiling. Going along with that stupidly long plan the old shit had turned out to be worth it. Even managed to get myself some of the Evil God's power.

Trying to kill the guy was fun, but he couldn't really hold much longer. Was fine though, fun was to be found wherever I looked!

"Chestooooo!!!"^[2]

"Gaahhh....."

I used the power I gained from Zerais' human experiments and absorbed the evil energy that that came off the dude's corpse.

Skill was called cannibalism. Let me absorb power from anything that was "the same

as me.” Think he said that meant both Evil Beings and Evil Beasts.

Rynford’s gotten me a tonne of prey. This rate, I could just go around hunting down evil beings to make myself stronger. And you know what? I might as well eat that old ass mother fucker while I’m at it too and make myself even more powerful!

Side: Colbert

“Urmetaagh! Dimitris Style Martial Art: Impact Wave!”

My fist drove itself into the muscular daruma’s face. It was strong, but failed to match me given that I had removed my restraints. [3]

“Colbert’s already defeated another one!”

“He sure is strong.”

“It looks like strong people end up turning into strong monsters.”

Lydia seemed to have hit nail on the head. The woman I had just defeated was a former E ranked adventurer. The transformation rendered her too difficult a foe for The Scarlet Maidens to safely combat.

One of the inn’s employees had also undergone the same sort of transformation, however, they had ended up much weaker. Even they had been able to dispose of him without too much trouble.

If Lydia’s conjecture was to truly be the case, then the area in which we were currently located could be considered relatively safe. The most dangerous areas likely lay near the Adventurer’s Guild and Knight’s Headquarters. Another cause for concern was the noble’s district, seeing as how a part of it had already erupted into a pillar of flame. That, of course, was not the end of my concerns. My final worry lay with Miss Fran, as I was almost convinced that she knew the incident’s cause.

I do hope she manages to make back safely.

“Oh yeah, I’ve been meaning to ask, have you like powered up or something, Colbert?”

“You can tell?”

“I can.”

“You’re clearly moving faster than you were before.”

“I guess I don’t really mind letting you know. I’m currently studying the Dimitris school of martial arts. Specifically, I’m undergoing a trial in order obtain the school’s recognition.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“Makes sense.”

The girls were able to understand exactly what I meant despite my lack of a detailed explanation. I did understand why that was though. The Dimitris school’s trial was rather famous.

“Huh? What’s that supposed to mean?”

Apparently Judith was unaware of the trials and their details, so I decided to offer her a short explanation.

I was sure she knew of Dimitris and his exploits, but I explained his profile to her regardless. I told her that he was an S ranked adventurer known as the world’s strongest Fighter. I described his feats, and made mention of how he defeated a dragon with his bare hands, and even managed to pummel a demon to death unarmed. After solidifying his style, he eventually created a school in order to pass it on and allow it to be learned by future generations.

His school of combat was so mighty that not even the Gods could overlook it. His techniques were obtained official recognition as a skill, a feat that had only ever occurred twenty times in the past.

The martial arts had long been recognized by the Gods as the most efficient mode of combat, a consensus reached upon the witness of a match between the God of Battle and the God of War. Martial arts came to be known for their flexibility, their capacity to allow their users to react to and deal with almost any given situation. Each martial artist had their own techniques, their own special attacks and feints, but

their techniques all fell under the umbrella known as martial arts regardless.

The same applied to all forms of combat. That is, if I were a swordsman, my sword related skills would continue to be known as Sword Arts and Sword Techniques regardless of any methodologies and thought paradigms I had established. Under normal circumstances, I would never be able to obtain the “Colbert Style Swordplay” skill regardless of how hard I trained. That much was common sense.

However, common sense was a factor that failed to extend into the realm of the ingenious. The gifted sometimes refined themselves to the point where not even the Gods dared deny their abilities, and thus, they were granted skills in their name. The techniques they created were engraved into the very world itself.

And that was precisely what had happened to Demitris. His style was ultimately classified as a derivative of the martial arts series of skills.

I enrolled myself in his school and trained in the Demitris ways until my Demitris Style skill had ascended to its eighth level. Only then did I finally managed to meet the school’s minimum requirements for formal apprenticeship.

Rather, I had managed to qualify myself for the trial that would lead to my admission to formal apprenticeship, the world renown Demitris school’s trial.

The trial’s contents required the examinee to become an A ranked adventurer whilst suppressing their strength with one of Demitris’ carefully crafted sealing stones.

The sealing stones possessed the ability to disguise one’s stats. It would hide the Demitris Style Martial Arts skill and the sealed state from any would be appraisers. The reason for this was that clients may otherwise make claims against the examinee. It was possible for them to state that the examinee caused them losses as a result of them failing to give their full, unsealed effort.

Of course, it was possible to undo the seal if desired, as evidenced by my actions.

“I see, that explains that.”

“I plan to seal my abilities away once after we put this incident is behind us, so please refrain from spreading the word if possible.”

“Don’t worry, we will.”

“So what now, Colbert?”

“I do think we’ve managed to avert any crisis, but I’d like you three to remain here at the inn and protect it just in case.”

“What’ll you do?”

“I will be heading over to the Adventu—”

A loud smashing sound cut me off before I managed to convey my intentions.

“W-What was that?”

“I-I think that’s where the temple is.”

“That thing’s enormous!”

“That... looks like it’s bad news. My Crisis Detection skill has activated despite how far away we are from it.”

I can’t say for sure whether or not the monster standing near the temple’s ruins was the cause of this whole incident, but I knew that I simply could not leave it be.

“It may even end up destroying Barbra in its entirety if worse comes to worst.”

“Is it really that strong?”

“To be frank, I doubt I’ll be able to defeat it.”

“Even with your seal undone!?”

“So it’s too strong? Even for True Colbert?”

I would very much appreciate if she would stop calling me that.

“At most, I would be able to buy the city some time assuming I was by myself.”

“What if w-”

“Don’t.”

“Why not?”

“I’d prefer not to send you to your deaths in vain.”

My reply caused all three girls to lower their gazes. I was sure that they understood that they would encounter instant deaths should they follow me, and that I would likely meet the same fate in an effort to protect them.

“I’ll be off. I leave the inn’s protection to you.”

“Alright...”

“I’ll... We’ll do everything we can!”

“Let’s go help the knights get everyone evacuated!”

“Great idea, but don’t be pushing yourselves too hard.”

“Same goes to you, Colbert!”

Side: Amanda

I arrived in Barbra two days after receiving Fran’s letter. I had done everything in my power in order to arrive as quickly as possible. In fact, I’d travelled in a straight line, I passed through mountains and forests without so much as changing directions. Naturally, I had been using magic to make this possible. My excessive consumption of mana potions had led my stomach to swell uncomfortably.

There was no way for me to leave Alessa under normal circumstances, as at least one A ranked adventurer was required to stay within the town’s premises at all times in order to deter the Kingdom of Reidos from attacking.

I was quite lucky in the sense that I just so happened to have a scapegoat on hand. I owed Jean my thanks. He was a B ranker, but treated like an A ranker when it came to

any sort of situation related to war. In fact, I'd say that the Reidosians feared him much more than they did me.

Jean's nickname, "The Annihilator" was one that stemmed from a Reidosian conflict. His abilities would really shine whenever he was put up against any sort of army. His forces would absorb the enemies and grow seemingly infinitely as the battle progressed. On one occasion, his undead corps had in fact managed to completely obliterate a Reidosian unit 5000 strong. Their army feared him, and for good reason at that.

His presence and accomplishments were why I was able to safely push, er, leave the city in his hands and head off in Barbra's direction.

Fran had said that she thought the orphanage to be in a terrible state, and frankly, I was inclined to agree. I had nothing but respect for Io, who, in spite of her situation, was able to continue feeding the children delicious meals.

It was fine though. I immediately bought the orphanage the moment I arrived and provided it with all sorts of funds and support. Seeing the children thank me made the whole trip well worth it. Their smiles gave me enough fuel to fight another ten years worth of battles.

The next task on my list was to pay Fran a visit. She was running a stall, so I decided to drop by under the guise of a customer as a bit of an added surprise. I was really looking forward to seeing a surprised look on her face. Keyword: was.

"Haaaaaahh!"

My whip easily cleaved a monstrosity in two. It seemed rather weak. It had been an adventurer prior to its transformation, but the resulting monster didn't seem like anything a D ranker couldn't handle.

"Right, I should hurry over to that giant."

A roar echoed through the night right as I finished exterminating all the monstrosities in the orphanage's immediate vicinity. The battlecry was followed by an immense wave of evil energy, the likes of which I'd never felt before.

Glancing at the monstrosity, even from a distance, told me that it was a dangerous foe

to face. It would likely destroy the entire city if I let it be, and that, of course, would mean that the orphanage would be reduced to wreckage and rubble.

I felt pretty confident in leaving the orphanage in the knights' and adventurers' hands, but I still wanted to return as soon as I could.

I was worried about Fran too.

My next course of action would of course be to take down the giant foe and search its surroundings for clues. There was some doubt as to whether or not I would be able to defeat it unassisted, but I simply had no choice. Thus was the duty of the A ranked adventurer.

Besides...

"That thing'll end up hurting a lot of children if I leave it to its devices!"

I sensed several other individuals carry out actions identical to my own. It appeared to me that they were the city's higher ranking adventurers.

"There's one."

I approached the closest individual.

"Good evening."

"Woah! H-Huh? G-Good evening."

The person I met with was an adorable young lady with silver hair. She was carrying her body rather effectively, but I could still see quite some room for improvement. She didn't seem strong enough to be handling a task like challenging the giant, and so, I decided to advise her to stop.

"Are you heading to that giant thing over there?"

"I-I am. Are you?"

"Yes, I am. The name's Amanda. What's yours?"

“Charlotte. I’m not very strong, but I’m sure that there’s something for me to do regardless.”

She seemed quite motivated. I wasn’t able to immediately determine how I should be going about changing her mind. The other adventurers joined us before I managed to arrive at a conclusion.

“Hey there. Are you planning to help give that thing a good bashing?”

“It is for that precise reason that I have arrived.”

It seemed that all members present had felt it dangerous to challenge the creature alone.

“Hundred Blade Forrund, Amanda of Hairiti, Knight Captain Phillip, and even the guildmaster: Dragonfeller Gamud? Quite the gathering of big shots we have here.”

The man who spoke, Colbert, seemed rather surprised. He stated that the knight captain was said to be at least as strong as a B ranker. I was aware that the guildmaster was a former A ranker himself. Forrund and I were both A rankers as well, meaning we had more than enough capable individuals to take down the gigantic monstrosity.

“And who might you be?”

I turned towards our last supposed companion.

“No one important, don’t be minding me. Just think me a nameless helper or something.”

“If you were to ask me, I’d say you resemble the Berserker.”

“What, you wanna take me in or something? At a time like this? You guys need all the help you can get.”

“I’m aware of that, I’ll be counting on you then.”

His points were valid, so I decided to accept his help, at least for now.

“Course. I can’t actually beat you guys down yet, not as I am right now anyways. Besides, I’m way more interested in that giant thing over there than you guys in the

first place, so we can all spend some time getting along for now, right? And of course, I'm talking to the guy glaring at me from over there too."

"...I'll overlook you for now."

Colbert and the Berserker seemed to have some sort of bad blood with one another. The atmosphere was almost explosive in nature. I suspected that I may have had to discipline them before moving onto eliminating the giant, but fortunately, both men clearly understood that this wasn't the time for any sort of internal conflict.

Again, we definitely had enough battle power to take our foe down.

However, there was still an issue. The monstrosity had a barrier around it, one that the Hundred Blade claimed to be unable to break. He was known for his brute strength, so I highly doubted that anyone else present would be able to shatter the barrier.

"The barrier seems to both block out magic and ignore the laws of physics. We're stuck waiting until that thing runs out of mana."

How troublesome.

The Hundred Blade also informed us that there was someone inside the barrier, and that that someone was currently engaging the monstrosity in combat. We had no choice but to wait until the combatant managed to deplete the monster's mana pool. The barrier appeared as if it may also end up being temporarily released if the person fighting was to fall, as apparently, it had originally been constructed in order to keep the individual within its confines. Ideally, I would prefer for the latter option not to happen. The person was brave enough to challenge the monstrosity before any other had arrived on scene. It was their actions that allowed us to arrive before the town's destruction, so I would like for them to live.

Charlotte timidly entered our conversation as we went back and forth on how we should best approach the problem.

The young lady stated that she had a skill that allowed her to purify evil energies. She could potentially eliminate the barrier.

"Really?"

“Really. The ritual I would perform would be one that combines both dance and song. I’m not really good at fighting, but I should be able to at least do that much.”

“That’s perfect. Everyone has their specialities, and yours is one that just happens to be exactly what we needed.”

And so, we came up with one some claimed to be a plan. I myself doubted the the claim, as all we decided on was that we would attack the monstrosity the moment Charlotte removed its barrier.

“Here goes...”

Charlotte’s bracelet vibrated and gave off a bell-like noise as she started to dance.

“Let’s get ourselves ready while she finishes up with the ritual.”

I raised my whip and began focusing my magical energies.

The time to fight was upon us.

CHAPTER 130

FRUSTRATION

“Pierce, oh blades of mine.”

A hundred or so swords materialized out of nowhere and shot straight towards Rynford’s body. We were watching the battle from pretty close up, so I could actually tell that every single blade was distinct, each possessed its own unique properties and abilities.

This wasn’t the first time we’d come across the guy who’d launched the attack. I still remembered catching sight of him at the end of our hunting trip.

General Information

Name: Forrund Annonnkul

Age: 39

Race: Human

Job: Divine Swordsman

State: Normal

Status Level: 66/99

HP: 718

MP: 431

STR: 384

VIT: 323

AGI: 337

INT: 201

MGC: 227

DEX: 349

Skills

Swordbreaker Arts: Lv 7

Dismantling: Lv 8

Crisis Detection: Lv 6

Vital Point Detection: Lv 5

Presence Detection: Lv 7

Sword Techniques: MAX

Divine Sword Techniques: Lv 6

Sword Arts: MAX

Divine Sword Arts: Lv 7

Collecting: Lv 4
Kicking Techniques: Lv 5
Kicking Arts: Lv 6
Resistance to Psychological Abnormalities: Lv 4
Petrification Resistance: Lv 3
Elemental Blade: Lv 8
Leap: Lv 7
Throwing: Lv 8
Poison Resistance: Lv 3
Dual Blade Style: Lv 7
Magic Resistance: Lv 6
Paralysis Resistance: Lv 4
Vigour Manipulation
Dragon Killer
Beast Slayer
Greater Strength Increase

Innate Skills

Sword Technique 50% Cost Reduction

Extra Skills

Sword God's Blessing

Titles

Adored by the Sword God
Liberator of Haunts
Dungeon Conqueror
Dragon Killer
Beast Slayer
A Ranked Adventurer

Equipment

Orichalcum Longsword
Orichalcum Swordbreaker
Dragon Lord's Leather Full Body Armour
Sword God's Headband
World Tree Bark Shoes
Dragon Eating Spider Silk Mantle
Braclet of Mana Recovery
Bracelet of Substitution

Forrund? Oh yeah, I remember Colbert mentioning him and calling him an A ranked adventurer. I think his nickname was Hundred Blade Forrund or something like that? Either way, he really did seem just as strong as Amanda.

His extra skill was pretty impressive too. Its description said it'd let him duplicate any magic sword he managed to get his hands on, with the exception of anything super high tier. That really got me thinking, would he be able to copy me...? What would happen if he did? I was feeling pretty curious about it, but honestly, I'd prefer not to find out. Neither of the two conclusions were what I would call trouble free, so I'll have to sure I stay as far away from him as possible.

Colbert looked like he was participating in Rynford's subjugation as well. He seemed a bit stronger than usual, seemingly because of that Demitris Style skill. I don't remember seeing that last time I appraised him. Had he been keeping it hidden with a piece of equipment or something? If so, then why the sudden change?

Everyone else present was pretty strong too. The Gamud guy really seemed to stand out in particular. His Divine Hammer Arts allowed him to swing his giant warhammer around like it was nothing. His strikes were so powerful that they actually ended up making Rynford stagger despite the difference in the two combatant's sizes. It turned out that he was actually Barbra's guildmaster, which more than explained his strength.

The knight named Phillip was also doing pretty well. He swung a large knight's spear around with ease despite being covered from head to toe in plate armour. The most interesting part about him was that his last name was Krysten, meaning he was probably Rhodas' eldest son. Bluke must not have understood the extent of his elder brother's strength. Any assassins he sent after Phillip would probably have ended up dead.

Zerrosreed was fighting alongside them for some odd reason as well. I guess he probably had his own reasons, seeing as how he betrayed Rynford and all that. He didn't seem intent on attacking Colbert for the time being either, so I didn't really think we needed to pay his loyalties all that much mind, at least not for now. I was more so worried about his current species. He wasn't just your everyday Evil Being, he'd apparently become a subspecies known as a Demonic Being. That Cannibalism skill pretty bad news. It wasn't the type of skill that either Fran nor I could make much use of, but to him, the city was pretty much like an all you could eat buffet. Wait, did he betray Rynford just so he could consume him? Hmm... I get that he's technically an ally for now. I don't plan on attacking him, but it'd probably be pretty bad to just leave him be...

"Fran!"

“Amanda?”

“Are you alright? I hadn’t been expecting you to be the one fighting that gigantic monstrosity!”

“Here, why?”

“I hurried over the moment I got the letter you sent me.”

The weird snake-like thing currently keeping Rynford restrained turned out to be Amanda’s whip. Wait, didn’t we only just send that letter like three days ago? Holy crap she got here fast.

[You sure it’s okay for you not to be in Alessa?]

“Don’t worry about it, I’m having Jean watch over the town in my place.”

[Wait, isn’t Jean just a B ranker though?]

“He is, but he’s treated like he’s an A ranker in times of war.”

Amanda told us a few things about Jean and convinced me that he was well deserving of his nickname. The ability to command an entire army’s wroth of undead? Yup, sounded threatening enough to me.

A young girl ran up to us as Amanda gave Fran a bit of a hand. She seemed terrified of Rynford, and kept glancing in his direction as she approached. In spite of her fears, however, she still managed to reach Fran and offer her a potion.

“Um... Are you alright?”

“Seen somewhere before?”

[Yeah, we have. She was one of the Lunar Banquet’s dancers.]

“My name is Charlotte. How are your injuries?”

“Nn. Fine. Just slight exhaustion.”

She was more than just a little bit exhausted, both physically and mentally.

“I want to talk to you a bit more, but first, I’m going to have to go get rid of the monster that hurt you, okay?”

“Make sure you be careful out there!”

Charlotte gave Rynford another quick glance as she spoke.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll be right back.”

Amanda gave both Fran and Charlotte a light wave before leaping towards the Evil Human. Her kind smile had transformed into a ferocious one, she seemed rather angry at the fact that Rynford had hurt Fran.

She immediately began attacking him with what I assumed was some sort of skill. Her whip grew several times longer and attacked him from every direction at once each time she gave her wrist so much as even the slightest twitch. Every single one of her strikes was as powerful as one of our sword techniques.

The other combatants’ attacks were inflicting quite a bit of harm of damage as well. They were all clearly stronger than us.

Just looking at the scene really made it hit home that Rynford had never actually been invincible or anything like that. So, knowing that, why was it that I never thought of anything but running away? Did we really have no way of fighting him at all?

I understood the answer to both questions. I had been afraid of Rynford, and my fear of him had ended up making me feel as if it was simply impossible for us to defeat him. I ended up doing nothing but thinking about how we could go about running away, even after getting two new unique skills. I mean, the outcome we arrived at wasn’t necessarily a bad one. We managed to avoid the worst case scenario of death, but thinking back on it, we’d been far too cowardly. Why did not try pointing one of my offensive skills instead? We might’ve been able to face him head on if I had.

(Master.)

[What’s up?]

(Frustrating.)

[Yeah... It sure does feel frustrating doesn't it...?]

Watching Amanda and everyone else present fight filled me with a sense of irritation. I was going to have to fix the fact that I was still weak. I needed to train, and seriously, at that. It was something I needed to start the moment this issue was dealt with and out of the way.

[...No, that's not right.]

I realized that I was still letting my fears get ahold of me. There was no reason for me to wait until everything was done and over with. The battle had yet to end. We could still join the fray and contribute to Rynford's defeat.

There was no point to just sitting around and mulling over my sense of frustration. The enemy that'd caused it was right there in front of us. We had no reason to rule out combat as an option as we had before. I understood that I still felt the subconscious urge to run the hell away, but now, we were immediately presented the chance to turn that emotion on its head.

What we needed to do now was not to wait, but to fight.

[Let's go, Fran.]

(Will pay back for frustration.)

Fran understood my intentions. It seemed I was still no match for her in terms of mental fortitude.

"Are you planning to join the battle?"

Fran was given a worried look as she rose to her feet. I thought for a second that Charlotte had intended to stop us, but, she instead ended up giving us a bit of encouragement alongside a potion.

"Do your best out there."

“Nn.”

“I can’t fight myself, but I will at least be able to offer you my assistance.”

Charlotte brought her hands together as she spoke. A mysterious light enveloped Fran’s body, accompanied by the chiming of a bell filled our ears.

“I have given you a barrier that exorcises and wards off evil energies. But be careful, it’s rather frail.”

“Monster’s barrier. Broken by you?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

Wow, seriously? I’m sorry I thought your stats were really low.

(Everyone amazing.)

[Yeah.]

Stats were important, but they weren’t all that mattered. The abilities to adapt and draw out one’s potential to its fullest were just as important.

Fran went silent for a bit, seemingly lost in thought.

[What’s the matter?]

(Master. I’ll lead.)

[What do you mean?]

(Couldn’t do anything when running from Rynford. Not just this once. Always relied on Master. This time, let me lead.)

[Fran...]

I’d actually been thinking that I was trying too hard to do everything by myself. I didn’t ask Fran for her opinion nearly as often as I should have, but, it looked like all that was about to change.

[Alright, got it. What are you planning though?]

(Want to try something new.)

[Like what?]

(Finishing move like Master's Overburst. Thought about it for a long time already. Conclusion, attack that uses everything we have at once.)

Her use of the word "we" meant that she wanted me to be doing something as well. More importantly though, it implied that she was confident she'd be able to draw out every last bit of my power. Awesome! As a sword, I couldn't feel more blessed. I was sure that I would one day grow to rival even the Godblades if I were to remain in Fran's hands.

(Want specific skills to be set.)

I think this might be the first time Fran's ever asked me to set any specific skills in combat.

[Alright, take your pick.]

And so, with Fran's selected skills in tow, we took off and dove straight in Rynford's direction.

CHAPTER 131

STRENGTH AND TECHNIQUE

“Master. Thing I wanted to try.”

[Lay it on me. I’m ready for whatever, though I’m a bit nervous because we aren’t really going to get to practice it or anything.]

“Nn. Skills. Air Compression, Magic Thread Weaving...”

Fran ultimately ended up asking me to set fourteen different skills: Flame Magic, Wind Magic, Atmospheric Circulation Control, Air Compression, Air Jump, Vibration Fang, Anti-Weight, Weight Boost, Elemental Blade, Charge, Parallel Processing, Magic Thread Weaving, Magic Poison Fang, and Coordination.

She got to work the moment I had them set, and raised both arms in front of her with her palms facing forward. She made use of the Atmospheric Circulation Control skill and created herself a pair of cube-shaped blocks of air, each about a meter and a half across. Each was populated by a bunch of thin magic threads.

[Oh, I get it now! Nice thinking!]

The combination allowed her to manipulate the threads in midair and move around in kind of the same manner as Spiderman or someone with a Three Dimensional Maneuver Gear.

Fran immediately moved the threads behind her and leaned on them to pull them back. They were elastic, so they quickly sprung back against her and launched her through the air.

At first, I’d thought that her actions resembled those of a pro wrestler, but a bit more observation led me to think of the threads as the spring in a pinball machine.

Fran used Air Compression and covered me in a layer of wind as she leapt into the air and delivered a powerful overhead swing.

“Nn. Works well.”

She nodded with a satisfied look on her face. I didn't know exactly what she was planning, but it looked like it was going well.

“Time for practical application. Will explain in detail.”

Fran filled me in on her plan. The thing she had in mind was nothing short of interesting, though, under normal circumstances, it would likely be labeled as reckless.

[Alright, let's do this.]

As per her suggestions, I used Long Jump and teleported us way up into the sky directly atop Rynford's head.

“Starting now.”

[I'll support you with everything I got!]

“Nn!”

Fran began compressing the air and generating magic threads the moment she teleported. Unlike our little trial run, however, this time, she was going all out and pouring every last bit of magical energy she could muster into her spells. She soon started free falling, but didn't seem to mind as she calmly placed the thread she constructed above her head.

She then used Air Jump to leap straight up, and did exactly as she had during the little practice session earlier. This time, however, she didn't fly launch herself horizontally. Instead, she propelled her body straight down.

And that was just the beginning.

Fran used Air Jump and Wind Magic in tandem to create herself a series of vertical footholds, which she ran straight down in order to raise her speed even further. She readied me for action by raising me above her head and used Atmospheric Circulation Control to minimize the amount of wind resistance generated while also using Weight Boost to bolster my weight to a point well over the fifty kilogram mark.

I'd become incredibly heavy for a weapon, but the combination of Fran's strength stat and the Anti-weight skill allowed her to continue wielding me without any issue.

We rapidly closed in on Rynford, while using the Espionage skill to remain undetected.

I molded the shape of my body as she got ready to swing. She'd requested me to take on a form with a backwards arching blade. There were a few other instructions as well, and so, in the end, I ultimately ended up as something that closely resembled a katana, a result that left me shocked. I'd never told her about katanas before, the idea she had was one that she'd formed all on her own.

The only worry I had was that our sword skills wouldn't end up applying to katanas. We did have a few potentially applicable skills, like Single Edged Sword Arts, but their levels were all fairly low. The fact that Single Edged Sword Arts and Double Edged Sword Arts had been differentiated meant that they likely were mutually exclusive, so I made sure to leave two edges and retain a more longswordy shape in general. ^[1]

"Oh?"

Rynford finally noticed us after we got within the twenty five meter range, which made sense. It was pretty hard to avoid detection without any cover given our proximity to him.

"You were still alive, girl!?"

Rynford stared at her with bloodshot eyes as he let loose a hate filled scream. A rancid, purple miasma accompanied his words and leaked out of his mouth as he shouted. The smoke-like substance was filled with evil energy; everything that touched it, be it skin or armour, would end up melting away as if dipped in acid. The most annoying part about it was that it had an incredibly large area of effect.

So what do? I had no idea how we were supposed to go about avoiding it.

"One trick pony."

I didn't manage to think up a solution myself, but it was an attack that we'd already seen time and time again. Fran had long predicted it and prepared a countermeasure.

“Burnia”

Burnia, a level two flame spell, allowed its caster to use the power of an explosion in order to provide themselves a burst of speed. It was a bit difficult to use, as the caster would end up getting caught in the explosion radius.

Fran quickly created a barrier of wind that served not one or two, but three functions. It reduced the amount of damage the explosion inflicted upon us, allowed her to increase her velocity even further, and even protected her from the miasma’s effects as she charged straight through it.

Rynford’s eyes bulged as he realized that she managed to break through his smokescreen without taking any damage.

“Damn you, you impudent brat!!”

He rapidly raised both arms and guarded his face against the assault he couldn’t help but label as dangerous.

What an idiot.

He’d fallen for our feint. Fran had directed all her bloodlust at him while gazing straight into his eyes, so he’d assumed that we’d been targeting his head.

But that was far from the truth.

“Haaaahhhhh!”

[Haaaahhhhh!]

Fran’s strike was aimed not at his cranium, but at his torso.

The level five Collaboration skill allowed me to understand her intents without the two of us having to perform any sort of actual communication. I casted Elemental Blade to wreath my body in flame, activated Vibration Fang, and triggered Magic Poison Fang right as we got ready to strike.

And of course, I wasn’t the only one to act. Fran had activated the exact skills, but with

Magic Poison Fang substituted out for Weight Boost. She seemed to know that my blade wouldn't hold out for too long, so she made sure that the six skills we casted remained active for only a fraction of a second.

That, however, was more than enough. Fran drew me from the air she had compressed around me like a sheath and concentrated all her energies into a single godspeed slash.
[2]

Her attack wasn't like my Telekinetic Catapult. It wasn't something as simple or dull as a display of brute force, but rather, a finely crafted technique that embodied the very meaning of the term "ultimate." [3]

"Nraaaaghhhhhhhh!!"

The vicious strike left a deep wound that extended all the way from Rynford's shoulder down to his midsection. I felt my blade sever his very heart in two.

We weren't able to immediately check out our handywork in detail, as I was forced to teleport Fran away before she crashed into the ground.

"Thanks Master."

[Whew, barely made it.]

Fran was calm despite the fact that we would've ended up face planting into the earth's surface if I waited even a second longer. Not to brag, but I could tell she really trusted me.

We turned back towards Rynford shortly afterwards in order to examine the effects of our actions.

"Curse you! Cursseee yyouuuuu!!"

That single strike removed half his life force. He had no choice but to take a knee as blood spilled out of his newly opened wound.

Wait, he's *still* not dead!? Holy shit! Why the hell is he still alive after having his heart literally cut in half? Damn stubborn old man, just die already!

I was surprised that we didn't manage to finish him off, but all was good. Our efforts hadn't gone to waste.

[We did it Fran.]

"Nn! Ultimate obtained."

The only problem with our newfound secret technique was that it could only be used under a specific set of circumstances. We wouldn't use it in any sort of cramped environment, so it probably wasn't going to be all that useful whenever we went to the dungeon we'd been planning to check out.

Well, that only applied to the attack as a whole though. We could still use parts of it. That pseudo-sword draw technique? Yeah, I could see us using that all the time. Unlike the pain in the ass stuff you'd see in real life back in Japan, the sword draw technique Fran had devised was actually practical. It could be used for more than just a horizontal slash from one's waist, and the blade would actually accelerate far more quickly than usual when pulled from its sheath. Moreover, the technique had great synergy with the Weight Boost skill when used with a vertical slash.

It looked like Magic Poison Fang was doing its job too. Rynford's state now claimed him to be envenomed. That said though, he had Resistance to Abnormal Status Conditions and Regeneration so he wasn't actually taking all that much damage. That said, the fact that we'd more or less nullified the effects of Regeneration meant that he was now far more vulnerable to all the other combatants' attacks. In other words, he was pretty much screwed.

"Don't let the opportunity Fran's given us go to waste!"

"Mmph."

"Great job, Miss Fran!"

"Orders acknowledged!"

"I'll show you what it means to have a Dwarf's strength!"

"Hahahaha! These guys've all got some fight in em, but that'll have to wait. Right now, it's your turn, you old shit!"

“Do your best everyone!”

The all star team followed Amanda’s orders and focus fired Rynford. We wanted to join them, but that little trump card of ours had caused my durability to plummet. I wasn’t able to heal up enough in time to join them even with Instant Regeneration. Fran was pretty much completely out of mana too, unfortunately.

Rynford’s left arm was mauled by a spear as the rest of his body was pierced by countless magic swords and struck over and over again by an unrelenting whip. He was then lifted off the ground by one of Colbert’s uppercuts, only to have his right leg smashed back down and pulverized by the Guildmaster’s hammer.

“Gugagagagagaaaaahhhh! Y-You sons of bitchesss!!!”

“The finishing blow is mine!”

“Damned traitor...!”

Zerrosreed’s assault had ended up removing his other leg and caused him to crumple onto the ground. Turned out the Berserker really had been going for the finisher. Bastard was trying to use his Cannibalism skill to make himself even stronger.

But luckily, it turned out that the battle had still yet to end.

“Hooooowlll!”

Urushi imitated Fran’s actions and dashed straight down from somewhere way up high. He drove his fangs into Rynford’s neck and gave it a good tear before plummeting back into the shadows the moment he was about to faceplant.

Damn boy! You totally just stole the spotlight right there!

“Graaaaggh... Why... Not like this...”

And leaving only those four words, Rynford breathed his last.

“Oh god fucking damn it! Stupid god damn dog got in my way again!!”

CHAPTER 132

RYNFORD'S DEMISE

Urushi's attack functioned as the finishing blow; Rynford was deprived of his life force and left only the ability to voice one final hateful cry before passing away. His body promptly reacted to his passing. His flesh began peeling off his muscles and his corpse rapidly decomposed into a fine ash.

His end was abrupt, so abrupt, in fact, that it almost seemed underwhelming.

"Whimper..."

Urushi popped out from the shadows as Rynford's remains continued to degrade. The combination of his pain filled whimper and the blood dripping from his mouth indicated that something wasn't quite right.

[What happened boy? You alright?]

"Rynford's fault?"

"Whimper..."

We quickly peeked into his maw and found the source of his pain. The large wolf's fangs were in a sorry state. Ever last bit of his jaw seemed to have been suspect to some sort of damage. Worst of all were his canines, which had been torn out altogether. Their now empty sockets had even started to hemorrhage.

Despite all the damages incurred, I couldn't really say I was even the slightest bit surprised. The attack Fran and I had used was one that came with enough drawbacks to completely wreck my blade. Urushi had copied us, so it only made sense for something similar to happen to his fangs.

[Don't be pushing yourself too hard now, alright?]

"Woof."

“But, actions performed were cool.”

“Bark!”

I quickly patched him up by throwing a few heals at him.

<Fran has leveled up.>

<Fran has leveled...>

The battle had ended, so the System Announcer chimed in with a few notifications.

Rynford had been worth a tonne of experience. Fran managed to gain three levels; she hit level forty despite the fact that the exp had ended up getting split nine ways.

General Information

Name: Fran

Age: 12

Species: Beastman (Black Cat Tribe)

Job: Magic Warrior

State: Contracted

Status Level: 40/45

HP: 450

MP: 382

STR: 251

VIT: 196

AGI: 248

INT: 172

MGC: 206

DEX: 170

Skills

Espionage: Lv 3

Court Etiquette: Lv 4

Presence Detection: Lv 4

Sword Techniques: Lv 5

Sword Arts: Lv 6

Blink: Lv 3

Fire Magic: Lv 2

Cooking: Lv 2

Insect Killer

Vigour Manipulation
Goblin Killer
Mental Stability
Skilled Skinning
Demon Killer
Determined
Directional Sense
Night Vision
Magic Manipulation
New: Evil Killer
New: Evil Resistance

Innate Skills

Magic Convergence
Special Skills
Black Cat's Divine Protection

Titles

Match for a Thousand
Insect Killer
Lord of Dismantling
Recovery Magic Adept
Goblin Killer
She who Slaughters
Skill Collector
Dungeon Conqueror
Giant Eater
Demon Killer
Fire Adept
Wind Adept
King of Cooking
Undead Killer
Skill Maniac
New: Evil Killer

Equipment

Black Cat Set (Body Armour, Gloves, Shoes, Earring, Cloak, Belt)
Power Bracelet + 1
Bracelet of Substitution
Skull Necklace

The **Evil Resistance** skill looked like it was something that'd resulting from all the damage she'd just taken. Her new title was pretty interesting as well. Appraising it ended up giving me the following results.

Evil Killer: A title bestowed upon those that have felled Evil Beings.
Effect: Grants the user the “Evil Killer” skill.

It seemed to be the type of title you got from killing some sort of super strong enemy as opposed to just killing a certain number of weaker enemies.

More importantly was the fact that she was about to hit her level cap. Thinking about what would happen filled me with curiosity. I couldn't wait.

Naturally, Fran wasn't the only one to level up. The same had happened to Urushi.

General Information

Name: Urushi
Species: Darkness Wolf (Magic Wolf (Magic Beast))
State: Normal
Status Level: 22/50
HP: 644
MP: 811
STR: 341
VIT: 290
AGI: 439
INT: 282
MGC: 511
DEX: 258

Skills

Darkness Resistance: Lv 8
Darkness Magic: Lv 3
Sense of Smell: MAX
Espionage: Lv 7
Fang Techniques: Lv 6
Fang Arts: Lv 6
Shadow Dwell: MAX
Shadow Travel: Lv 6
Air Jump: Lv 8
Fear: Lv 4
Vigilance: Lv 6
Presence Concealment: Lv 6
Regeneration: Lv 5
Deadly Poison Magic: Lv 1

Blink: Lv 5
Muffle: Lv 6
Spirit Magic: Lv 5
Life Force Detection: Lv 7
Resistance to Mental Abnormalities: Lv 6
Poison Magic: MAX
Echolocation: Lv 7
Roar: Lv 8
Shadow Slip: MAX
Dark Magic: MAX
Night Vision
Greater Poison Fang
Automatic HP Recovery
Automatic MP Recovery
Immune to Poison
Body Alteration
Magic Manipulation
New: Evil Detection
New: Evil Resistance

Unique Skills

Prey Absorption

Titles

Kin to the Sword

Kin to the God of Wolves

Looked like Urushi had managed to get himself a pair of new skills too. Wait, Evil Resistance? I don't recall him taking nearly as much damage as Fran... Hmm... I guess it was probably because of Prey Absorption. The skill would let him absorb a portion of the abilities of anything he ate, and I guess he did technically ingest Rynford's flesh and blood when he finished him off, so that's probably where he got that.

There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with him, but would it perhaps be better to have him not eat Evil Beings from now on?

[Alright, that's done and over with, so we should probably be going after Zerais now.]

(Nn.)

The only issue was that we had absolutely no idea where he was. I really wish we'd managed to get Rynford to tell us or somet- Oh wait. We could probably just get it out

of that Zerrosreed guy instead.

[Or... not? Where'd he go?]

"Nn? Vanished."

"Huh? Oh! Darn it! The Berserker got away!"

Amanda had overheard Fran's muttering, so she ended up giving the surroundings a quick once over that ultimately culminated in a frustrated shout.

When the hell? Didn't he literally just try finishing Rynford off?

"It looks like he might have the Anti-Perception skill..."

"Oh, I see him! He's right over there!"

The spot Amanda was pointing to was about fifty meters from where we were. Holy crap, when the hell did he leave...?

"The last hit should've been mine! I could've gotten my hands on a good chunk of that shitty old geezer's power! Everything would've gone perfectly if not for that god damned meddling dog! Fuck this, I'm out!"

"You won't be getting away!"

Colbert immediately dashed after Zerrosreed, but the berserker had been one step ahead of him.

"Hahaha! Zerais's up in the Alchemist's Guild if you need him, by the way, so goodbye to you!"

"Huh? He teleported?"

As evidenced by Amanda's surprised response, Zerrosreed had teleported himself away. Appearance wise, it looked pretty much identical to the stuff I could use. Rynford did something similar just a bit earlier as well, so my guess was that it was the effect of some sort of skill derived from the Evil Arts. Neither Zerrosreed nor Rynford seemed to have been able to use the skill on more than one occasion though, so it

probably had a few constraints on it or something.

“Tsk. I should’ve expected as much from someone with such a big bounty on his head, but he sure is good at running away. I’ll definitely get him next time!”

It looked like he managed to escape, but I figured we could still get him if we had everyone give us a hand. That said though, I decided to put the idea aside for the time being as capturing Zerais was much more important. We had no idea as to whether or not Zerrosreed was telling the truth, but he did already have a pretty good track record as far as betrayal went, so chances were that he was. Having some of us split off to go after Zerais served in his favour, so there was all the more reason for him not to lie.

“The air still gives off a sense of evil...”

Forrund’s words momentarily cleared my mind of all my thoughts regarding Zerais and Zerrosreed, and reminded me of the Evil Crystals Rynford had been using. I didn’t really know if they’d cause anything bad to happen without any outside fluence, but it probably wasn’t a good idea to just leave them be anyways.

“Might still be here. Evil Crystals.”

“What Evil Crystals?”

Fran quickly answered the Guildmaster and began talking about the crystals Rynford had been using. Her explanation immediately led everyone around her to turn pale and immediately start digging through the temple’s debris.

Charlotte played a pretty key role. Apparently, she was fairly sharp as far as evil energies were concerned, so she managed to find both crystals almost immediately. They were buried under a bunch of other stuff, but Gamud was pretty good at earth magic, so he managed to get them out in a jiffy.

“So these are the Evil Crystals you were talking about...”

“Evil energies thinner?”

Fran had been on point. The Evil Crystals were giving off much less energy that they’d been prior to Rynford’s transformation.

“You said that these were placed within the temple’s grounds?”

“Nn. Rynford performed ritual.”

“I see...”

“Have you figured anything out, Charlotte?”

“I’m not too confident in my theory’s correctness, but...”

According to Charlotte, temples effectively functioned to allow communication with the Divine Realm in which the Gods resided. Oracles and other similar individuals could use the connection in order to create a path, which in turn was used for job changes and the like. A job change in particular involved making use of the Divine Realm’s axioms in order to overwrite the data that pertained to one’s job.

The paths were governed over by the Gods themselves, so it was impossible for normal human beings to use them as they pleased.

Charlotte had deduced that the Evil Crystals had the ability to warp said path, and instead direct it towards the sealed off Evil God.

A few of the people that’d fought with us, Colbert included, immediately voiced their objections, but they were quickly overruled by Amanda and Gamud, who stated that it could be possible. Very little was known about the Evil God’s powers, and thus, warping the path could potentially fall within the realm of the Evil God’s capabilities.

Apparently, the Evil God had been split into a great number of smaller pieces upon its defeat. The core in particular had been taken into the Divine Realm, where it was placed under surveillance. We had no real way of confirming whether or not that was actually truth, but we assumed it was as that was what the legends said.

Either way, we decided to destroy the Evil Crystals. They probably wouldn’t see any decent use even if we did just leave them here, and not a single one of the individuals presented objected to the idea, so we had everyone join in and quickly smashed the crystals to bits.

Alright, that’s another task done. All that’s left for us to do now is hunt down Zerais.

“Amanda. Need help with something.”

“Sure, what is it?”

“Can request anything? No objections?”

“There’s no way I’d turn you of all people down, Fran. So, out with it. What did you need me to do?”

Luckily, Amanda was more than willing to cooperate, so we quickly told her and everyone else about Zerais. Specifically, we explained that he was the mastermind behind all this, that he was still at large, and that he still seemed to be up to something.

“I am surprised to hear that Zerais has yet to leave the city... I shall make good use of this opportunity and pay him back in full force for involving my brothers in his schemes.”

“I hadn’t heard his name in quite some time. I’d assumed that he’d already dropped dead.”

“We may be able to encounter the Berserker should we track him down.”

“I’m going to have to give those baddies a bit of punishment for the children’s sake.”

“Indeed.”

It seemed that everyone was willing and ready give solving this whole case a go, so we had Colbert, the person most familiar with the city’s layout, lead us over the Alchemist’s guild. The party we moved with was one of extraordinary strength. With them around, taking Zerais in would be easy as pie.

CHAPTER 133

THE ALCHEMIST'S GUILD

It didn't take long for us to arrive at the Alchemist's Guild. We ran into a few Evil Beings along the way, but they all ended up dying instantly seeing as how our party's specs were what they were. We had practically mowed straight through the city. The only person that had trouble keeping up was Charlotte, but we quickly rectified that issue by having her join Fran on Urushi.

I couldn't help but accuse our wolf companion of being a huge pervert. He refused to let men ride him, but was more than willing to shoulder a pretty girl or two. It might've also been because he thought of her as weak though, so I couldn't actually say for sure. I mean, he was totally okay with the orphanage's children after all, regardless of gender.

Thinking about it made me arrive at the conclusion that he seemed to think that men should be able to manage without any sort of assistance, an opinion quite similar to my own. I wonder... Did the summoning process intentionally pull in a creature with a personality that resonated with mine or something like that?

"I have eyes on the Alchemist's Guild, but..."

"Oi, ain't that our guild's bunch right there?"

The situation was basically exactly as Colbert and Gamud had described; a melee had broken out in front of the Alchemist's Guild. I could tell at a glance that the adventurers present were fighting a group of things, but I couldn't immediately discern what those so called things were as they didn't seem to be Evil Beings. I'd almost thought them to be the undead at first, but I could feel them giving off some sort of life force, so that couldn't have been the case.

I didn't manage to figure out what the things were before getting within appraisal range, so I just went and did that instead of thinking about it. They turned out to be Demonic Beings. In other words, they were the same species as Zerrosreed. Unlike the Berserker, however, the Demonic Beings the adventurers were fighting weren't really all that strong. Hence, I was much more interested in their abnormal status conditions

than anything else about them. Apparently, they were in the Impaired state. The hell was that supposed to mean?

“Let’s go back up the adventurers for now.”

“Indeed!”

“Here goes!”

Colbert and Gamud had both been a full step ahead of Amanda, as they’d already started charging the moment she started issuing orders. Phillip and Amanda jumped in immediately after, while Fran and Forrund wordlessly brought up the rear. Urushi didn’t join the fray, and instead sat around on standby as Charlotte’s guard.

“I’m here to help!”

“Guildmaster!”

Turned out that Eugene had joined the fray as well, as a member of the Adventurer’s Guild, of course. He had been firing off spells into the crowd in order to defeat the Demonic Beings.

“Eugene?”

“You’re here too, Fran?”

“What happened? Want explanation.”

“Well, you see...”

The Adventurer’s Guild was first notified of the Alchemist’s Guild’s plight about an hour back. One of the older alchemists that had kept in touch with Eugene even after the incident had barged into the Adventurer’s Guild in a panic and requested his friends’ assistance.

Apparently, one of the Alchemist’s Guild’s higher ups had been working together with an alchemist outside their ranks in order to conduct illegal experiments. The experiment’s participant then went on to using his concoctions in order to seize control over the Alchemist’s Guild’s upper stratum. He then forced those with less

influence to assist in the experimentation.

Specifically, the less influential alchemists had ended up being forced to function as lab rats. The old man had managed to escape his colleagues' fate as he had coincidentally holed himself up in his room and continued his research without exposing himself to the guild's other members.

The illegal experiments worked towards the goal of obtaining more information about Demonization, the process of imbuing magic stones inside of human beings in order to strengthen them. Interestingly enough, Demonization was in fact the precise topic that had led to the expulsion of Eugene's disciple.

That disciple's name had of course been Zerais. The Alchemist's Guild had supposedly washed its hands of Zerais' experiments the moment he was expelled, but one of the guild's higher ups had not only preserved all the data obtained, but also offered the fugitive both shelter from the authorities and the opportunity to continue his research.

The man seemed to have two reasons for his actions. The first was apparently that he believed the research to be of monetary value, governments and militaries would pay out the ass for that kind of information. The latter seemed to be that he, as an alchemist, thought that it would be wasteful to throw away all the useful data obtained.

"Then, those things. Former alchemists?"

"Precisely. I attempted to have their magic stones removed with the adventurers' assistance, but unfortunately it was to no avail..."

They'd tried pretty much everything they could think of. They experimented with healing magic, purification magic, surgery, and even brute force, but none of it was to any effect. The demonic beings were much like magic beasts, they would die the moment their magic stones were removed or destroyed. And of course, the human used the demonic being's base would end up dying as well in the process.

"Can't communicate?"

"We tried, but again, to no avail. The magic beings appear to have all gone insane."

Zerrosreed seemed to have retained his ability to think though. Was that because he'd had the magic stones transplanted into him as an Evil Being or something?

"Half had already been let loose by the time we arrived, but managed to encircle the Alchemist's Guild's building before the other half escaped its confines."

It was quite difficult for the adventurers to capture the Demonic Beings alive. There were a few small fry here and there, but many could use magic. Asking adventurers to take in something that powerful without killing it first was more or less equivalent to asking them to off themselves.

Hence, they'd only tried removing magic stones from the demons they happened to accidentally render incapable of combat.

"So we have no choice but to kill them?"

"Exactly."

Eugene responded to Amanda's question with a nod.

Well, I guess we kinda have to lend him a hand or two. I'm feeling a bit paranoid that one of them is going to suddenly power up the same way Rynford did, so yeah.

(Master. Gunning for magic stones.)

[Right, yeah, good point.]

Fran immediately dashed into the melee and swung me at one of the Demonic Beings, to which I responded by promptly absorbing its magic stone on contact.

General Information

Species: Demonic Being

State: Impaired

Status Level: 1/99

HP: 48

MP: 55

STR: 25

VIT: 23

AGI: 10

INT: 27
MGC: 25
DEX: 10

Skills

Painting: Lv 1
Compounding: Lv 1
Water Magic: Lv 2
Alchemy: Lv 4
Magic Manipulation

And of course, I gave his status a quick peak right before he died. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get my hands on the Painting skill he had, and to make matters worse, he was only worth a single magic stone point.

[Let's hurry up and get this over with.]

"Nn."

We followed Amanda and went even deeper into the mob of Demonic Beings, but much to my dismay, not a single one of them was worth more than just one measly magic stone point.

The moment I started grumbling my complaints was the the moment I spotted a Demonic Being that seemed to stand out from its peers.

"Strong."

[Sure looks like it. His stats are pretty high, and he isn't Impaired either.]

He was much stronger and faster than the other Demonic Beings. And, although it sat at a measly level one, he did technically have the Sword Arts skill. Fran ended up disposing of him in an instant anyways, but he still was pretty strong when compared all the others.

And you know what? Best part is that he gave more than just one magic stone point. Killing him and ended up getting me *three whole points*. Does the amount of points I get vary based off their state? Or is it something else instead?

"Will find even stronger Demonic Beings."

[Go for it.]

We ended up charging straight for the Alchemist's Guild's building despite it basically being the enemy's HQ.

"Any plans as far as taking control over the building goes, Gamud?"

"There ain't really anything to take control of. There don't seem to be any human beings inside the place anymore."

According to Amanda and Gamud, the Guild's interior was basically devoid of human life. There was some evil energy flowing out of from within it, but the amount was miniscule relative to what we felt back at the temple, so I didn't really think it to be an issue.

Urushi, however, thought otherwise.

"Growl."

He barked a low, guttural bark while staring straight at the building before us.

"Is something wrong, Urushi?"

"Woof woof!"

The wolf answered Amanda with a pair of more vigilant barks.

"Something coming."

"?"

"Are you certain? My senses are failing to react if so..."

Neither Forrund nor Philip were able to sense whatever it was Urushi was detecting. In other words, this was probably the work of his newly acquired Evil Detection skill, as no one else present happened to have it.

The skill was still just level one, but it seemed quite effective seeing as how he was

able to outdo several A ranked adventurers in terms of detection.

“I sense it now as well!”

“Really? You too, Charlotte?”

“Really. It seems to be coming from somewhere underground. Right, Urushi?”

“Woof woof woof!”

“Well, your impressions seem to match up, so I don’t see any reason to be doubting you.”

“Incoming attack detected.”

“It seems so. I can feel it in my fists.”

Everyone else finally started picking up whatever Urushi had sensed after about a minute or so.

Whatever was coming for us seemed a lot weaker than I’d initially anticipated. It was only giving off as much evil energy as your average Evil Being. However, I was still quite curious about it as it seemed to carry with it a sort of artificial nature. The part that piqued my interest the most was how it felt a lot more like clump of pure evil energy than an actual living thing.

All my questions were answered three minutes later, as whatever we’d detected finally made its way outside the Alchemist’s Guild’s confines.

“Is that a golem?”

“Huh. I can’t appraise the damn thing, it’s got Appraisal Blocking.”

Gamud was unable to learn anything about the golem despite having his appraisal skill leveled to 3. I tried taking a quick glance at it with the Eye of Empyrea, but even then, the only thing I got was its name. Apparently, it was a Magic Stone Soldier.

“Growl.”

[Get ready. Looks like it's shifting right into combat mode.]

“Nn!”

At this chapter's time of writing, TSKD was in fact the most popular web novel on Syosetu.

CHAPTER 134

ZERAIS' GOAL

Five Magic Stone Soldiers emerged from within the Alchemist Guild's depths. For some odd reason, they seemed to give off a heavy, intimidating air despite looking like a bunch of armoured gorillas.

They could also be described as golems with elongated arms. Either way, their bodies were made purely of a red and black, crystalline substance.

Their short legs made it so that their longer arms extended all the way down to the ground. A bit of further observation led me to realize that they very much resembled the robotic soldiers that guarded a certain castle in the sky.

None of the five gave off even the slightest bit of life force. It looked like they really were golems as opposed to powersuits or the like.

"Be careful. I can't appraise these damn things for the life of me. There's no way for us to tell what they have up their sleeves."

"All the more reason to attack them before they've a chance to attack us!"

Although Colbert kind of seemed like the kind of guy that'd enjoy charging right in, he was experienced enough to understand that running up to and punching an enemy whose abilities he knew little about was not exactly the best idea. Hence, his preemptive attack instead took the form of a skill somewhat similar to sword arts' Sonic Wave. That is, he fired off a shockwave in the Goldems' direction by punching the air.

The shockwave flew straight towards them. I could tell at a glance that it had more than enough power to mangle a hobgoblin and grind it to pieces.

But it had no effect.

Colbert's shockwave almost seemed to vanish altogether the moment it came into contact with the Magic Stone Soldier standing in front. It hadn't even taken any

damage from the attack.

I couldn't tell if it'd used a skill or invoked some sort of magic, but in either case, it seemed as if it hadn't been affected at all. Man, not being able to appraise something is a huge pain in the ass.

Seeing the Magic Stone Soldier's ability had caused our allies to halt in precaution. Four of our five enemies immediately took note of our hesitation and began swinging their arms in a large arc. It seemed that they were in the midst of gathering magical energy there within.

"Watch out! They're mounting an assault!"

"Oh Barrier of Wind."

"Howl! Granbolt!"

[Fire Wall.]

We setup our defenses the moment the golems unleashed their attacks.

"They're using composite attributes!?"

"That thing was as strong as a high tier spell!"

We had managed to ward off the golems' barrage, but the brute force that they came with had left quite an impression nonetheless. The wind bullets they fired had been about as powerful as what you'd expect from Storm Magic, but that wasn't all. They'd also thrown a few rarer elements into the mix, namely ice/snow, lightning, and lava.

The fact that golems were able to use magic was, in and of itself, a pretty rare occurrence, so seeing them use powerful spells derived from rare elements made the whole situation seem outright unrealistic.

Both Amanda and Gamud had shouted in surprise, and although Forrund refrained from speech, I could tell that he felt the same based on the fact that he'd gone wide eyed.

"So, how are you finding my Magic Stone Soldiers?"

“Nn?”

[Is that a hologram? Or is he using illusion magic or something?]

A man had materialized between us and the golems right after Amanda had another one of spells do nothing whatsoever to an enemy golem.

At first, I’d thought that he’d teleported here or something, but I’d very obviously been wrong. His translucent form and the occasional static that seemed to pulse through his body both evidenced that he was obviously just an illusion.

The man was so good looking that it pissed me the hell off. He looked to be about twenty, and had the ever so rumoured blonde hair and blue eyes. His stature was a bit on the smaller side, just enough so that I almost felt the urge to warn him to be wary of pedophiles.

“Who?”

“Zerais!”

“Oh, long time no see, Master of mine.”

Eugene ended up shouting out the man’s name and revealing to us his identity, but I still had a hard time digesting it. Like, was that seriously him? I really didn’t expect him to be so young and whatnot. I’d always pictured Zerais as an older dude in a lab coat.

“You haven’t really changed much.”

“Oh that? That’s just because I happened to get my hands on a bit of demon blood.”

Ohhh, I get it. If you inject yourself with the blood of a longer living race, you’ll end up looking much younger than you actually are.

“Are you the reason the guild’s alchemists are the way they are?”

“Well yeah. I put them all through my Demonization experiments, but as you can see, they ended up turning into failures. It looks like you need someone that’s really strong,

both in mind and body, if you want to actually get something out of shoving a magic stone inside of a human being. All the small fry I tried the experiment on ended up dying because their bodies rejected the magic stones. The ones lucky enough to live all ended up losing their minds. They might as well be zombies with the way they are, but oh well, I guess that's fine too since they're pretty easy to control."

Zerais proudly started to blab about everything he'd done. The look he had on his face pissed me off to no end. He seemed to love attention, so he ended up giving us a bunch of information for pretty much no reason at all.

"I still need just a bit more work on the Demonization end of things, but those Magic Stone Soldiers I've got over there are pretty much complete already. How are you finding them? Strong, right? I figured out how to make them when I was doing research on demons. I couldn't really get things to go the way I wanted at first, but one of my collaborators gave me a bit of a hand and helped me push them towards completion."

"Rynford?"

"That's right. Oh wait, I've got a pretty good idea who you are. You're that adventurer girl, Fran, right?"

"Rynford? Who's that?"

Hmmm, I see, so Eugene didn't even know Rynford existed.

"He's one of the Evil God's servants, and the guy behind this whole mess. Though, I can't really say I didn't lend him a hand or two. He taught me Evil Arts and several methods for handling evil energies, so I paid him back by teaching him all about alchemy and magic stones. Anyway, I know the night's been a bit of a rowdy one, but why don't you join in on all the festivities? Oh yeah, I just realized I lied a bit. I think I did end up participating in planning tonight out, since I did need two or three thousand souls, you see."

Zerais' smile was so pure and serene that it almost seemed like his actions hadn't caused him to feel even the slightest bit of guilt.

"W-Why would you..."

Eugene narrowly managed to squeeze out half a question as he stared his disciple down. The half insectman's face had clearly gone pale.

"Hmmm... Well, to sum it up, I guess it's cause I wanted to leave proof of the fact that I existed."

"What? I don't understand what you're saying."

"I guess I'll remove a step's worth of abstraction then. My goal is to become so famous that my name goes down in history. I'd like for people to remember me, even a thousand years down the line."

"Are you serious, Zerais...? You're willing to throw away people's lives for that mundane a reason...?"

Eugene's face stiffened. He took on a much more teacher-like air despite the fact that didn't seem to be able to comprehend the fact that his former disciple had gone mad.

"When was it...? When was it that you were first led astray...?"

"When? Well, I was always like this. The only difference is that I used to be a bit better behaved is all. You know, Master, I really do appreciate all you've done for me. Your lessons are the only reason why I'm even starting to get close to accomplishing my dream, you know?"

Eugene was honestly a pretty good, down to earth guy, but as a result, he couldn't understand why his apprentice was acting the way he was. He failed to comprehend his malice, no, his outright lack of concern for anyone but himself.

In other words, I was trying to say that Eugene was far too kind and naive. Though it sounded like I was kind of shitting on the guy, I really meant it as a good thing. Eugene's kindness and naivety seems to have been what's gotten him to where he is today. My guess was that he had believed that Zerais had been somewhere out in the world atoning for his sins with his day to day actions.

The way I saw it though, Zerais hadn't even the slightest desire to repent. He was more like a rotting apple. In fact, he'd gotten so rotten that he started draining the life of the other, healthier apples around him. At this point, I'd say it was even fair to start calling him a mutated apple. He seemed pretty normal from the outside, but his insides were

a total mess of toxic sludge. Anyone that tried to eat him would probably instantly die of food poisoning, so it'd be best to throw him out altogether. Yup, we needed to seek him out and eliminate him right away.

"Besides, what's so abnormal about wanting to get famous anyway? I'm pretty sure it's a normal thing pretty much everyone wants."

"You're right, Zerais. Fame is something commonly sought after, but that does not mean that you can just go around doing whatever it is you want. You cannot simply trod on the lives of other human beings! Are you truly satisfied with leaving behind a name soiled by a legacy of infamy?"

"Like I care. I don't mind being infamous at all. In fact, I'd rather be infamous than just famous, you know?"

"Why? Demanding Reason."

"Well, Fran, why don't I put it this way? Have you ever heard the tales of King Yvel and Saint Myurell? If not, then what of Dragonslayer Sigmund?"

"Know none."

"See? That's exactly my point. All three of the people I just mentioned were outstanding individuals famous for their accomplishments. The first had worked with a group of knights to hold back a horde of goblins 1,000,000 strong. In his time, he was known as The Heroic King. The second was a wandering saint, she travelled the lands and spent her entire life healing its people. The third was an adventurer that threw away his life in order to free the continent of Khrome from a Dragonic Lord that would've otherwise brought about its destruction. Their achievements were all quite amazing, don't you think?"

"Nn. Amazing."

"Yeah, but despite that, you didn't know about them until just now. In fact, few do, their names are unsung. But, what if I ask you about Trismegistus the Rebel? You know him?"

"Heard of."

“Of course you do. Pretty much everyone knows him. And now you get it, right?”

Wait, who the hell is Trismegistus?

[Hey Fran, who’s Trismegistus?]

(Famous alchemist. Really bad person. Destroyed continent of Goldishia.)

Fran quickly briefed me about the guy and his deeds.

Trismegistus was apparently a man that existed long in the past. He was a king, but not just any king. The kingdom he ruled over was so vast and powerful that it effectively had control over an entire continent. Yet, he wasn’t satisfied. He had tried to birth an almighty magic beast for the sake of achieving a single goal: world domination. And of course, his ambitions weren’t ones that could be achieved through normal means. Hence, he unsealed the Evil God’s heart and attempted to use its power.

The magic beast that resulted from such a decision was immensely powerful, so much so that it ended up obliterating an entire continent and almost all its people. Said magic beast continued to grow in strength by eating the very land itself. It got so large that it became capable of engulfing every last bit of landmass that remained in a single, fell swoop. The people despaired, but the Gods descended and offered them salvation. They created a massive barrier and entrapped the continent sized magic beast, the Abyss Eater. It’s said that the Abyss Eater continues to thrive within the barrier to this day.

On a side note, the Gods cursed Trismegistus in order to force him atone for his sins. Specifically, they provided him immortality while also leaving him within the barrier, hence forcing him to suffer as the beast consumes his flesh in perpetuity.

I’ve no real way of knowing whether or not the story is a factual depiction, especially seeing as how it’s used a bedtime story in order to discourage kids from misbehaving. But still, holy shit that’s terrifying. Like, damn, that is one hell of a curse. Gods, you scary as hell.

“Boy am I jealous of Trismegistus. Must be nice to be him!”

“What are you saying, Zerais!? That’s ridiculous! Wait... Don’t tell me you plan on undoing one of the Evil God’s seals...?”

“You know, that’s actually exactly what I had in mind. Don’t you worry though, I’m not planning on doing something as drastic as freeing a piece as major as its heart.”

“Are you trying to say that you think you can take control of it!?”

“In fact, yeah, yeah, I am. I can do it you know? I mean, just look at me! The only problem is that my little old collaborator had to end up dying on me before we actually got a chance to take a stab at it. I haven’t gotten enough souls either, and I can’t actually undo the seal myself. I mean, I may be gifted, but I’m not actually capable of using the Evil Arts.”

Whew.

“But you see, the thing is, I’m starting to get real annoyed with Fran over there, you know? First she takes the package I was having shipped over, then she got in the way when I tried having a few of my employees deal with the orphanage and whatnot, and now she’s even helped kill Rynford and his merry little friends.”

The orphanage? Wait, so he was the one after Io’s recipe?

“Want recipe why?”

“Nothing special. Just a bit of idle curiosity, you know?”

“Curiosity?”

“Yup, curiosity. At first, it was because Bluke wanted to know about it and wouldn’t stop nagging me, so I started by embezzling all money that normally would’ve been used on the orphanage’s operating expenses. You see, it costs money for me to get my hands on magic stones and equipment and the like, so I didn’t see any reason for me not to. I figured that they might start selling off the children if they didn’t have enough money to get by, and I was definitely in need of extra lab rats. It was totally a win win situation, right? I decided to pay the orphanage a quick visit in person a bit later on so I could start checking out the children ahead of time, but I then ended up realizing that the dishes that they served there were really quite strange, you see.”

“Dishes?”

“I mean, look at their ingredients. The stuff that they served there was obviously way better tasting than it really should’ve been. I thought that they might have access to some sort of technology that’d let them inject mana into their ingredients or something. Turned out that I was completely off the mark though.”

Zerais lightly laughed as he recalled his mistake.

Holy shit, this guy’s a huge fucking asshole. We can’t actually get to him, or even find him right no, but that didn’t really seem like too much of a problem at all. Amanda was giving off an incredible amount of bloodlust, so I figured he’d probably just made it to the top of her hit list. No mistaking it, he was totally in for a fate far worse than death.

“Anyway, this conversation’s dragged on for a bit too long already, so I’m going to be heading out. Oh yeah, and, just in case you were still wondering, I’m not actually at the guild anymore.”

“Running away?”

“Yes I am. My plan’s a total failure now that Rynford’s dead. I’d been planning to have his mass produced Evil Beings kill a bunch of people so I could use their souls to summon a piece of the Evil God’s flesh. It would’ve worked too, especially if Rynford had managed to draw from the Evil God’s power. Oh well, there’s always a next time. Have fun playing around with my Magic Stone Soldiers. Buh bye.”

Zerais’ projection gave a quick wave and disappeared immediately after he finished speaking.

[Seems like he was telling the truth. I can’t sense anyone in the guild at all.]

(Urushi. Can’t chase?)

(Whimper.)

[Tsk. God damn it.]

(Woof...)

[Oh uh... whoops. My bad Urushi, I wasn’t trying to say it was your fault or anything.]

Oh well, can't be helped I guess. Let's deal with these guys for now and figure out what to do about Zerais later.

CHAPTER 135

VERSUS: MAGIC STONE SOLDIERS

“So that was Zerais? He sure was an obnoxious one.”

“I can’t stand the fact that he’s managed to get away.”

“I fail to comprehend the extent to which he belittles the value of the citizen’s lives...”

“How terrible he is!”

“We’re going to have to deal with these things first if we want to hunt that asshole down though, you know?”

“Right.”

The entire all star cast seemed pretty pissed off at Zerais, but they all assented to the fact that the alchemist had already effectively escaped regardless.

We couldn’t really go after him anymore because we flat out had no idea where he was. Moreover, we kinda needed to take out the Magic Stone Soldiers before they caused any more harm. If we were lucky, we might even be able to get a clue or two out of investigating the alchemist’s guild afterwards.

That said though, defeating them would be a milestone in and of itself. We didn’t know precisely what their abilities did, but they seemed to be able to nullify any sort of ranged attack regardless of whether it was based in might or magic. They didn’t seem to be deploying any sort of barrier or anything like that, so I really had no idea what the hell was going on.

Colbert had tried throwing another ranged martial art or two at the things, but his attacks were once again rendered useless.

“Well, projectiles don’t work, so it looks like we’re stuck with good old close quarters combat. I’m a lot more durable than you lot, so I’ll volunteer myself to go up first.”

Gamud stepped up as he made a declaration whose contents sounded fairly logical. The fully armoured dwarf was the splitting image of a tank. I really couldn't imagine him going down all that easily, especially if he had a few buffs applied and whatnot.

"Sounds like a plan."

Amanda assented with a nod.

"Then here I go!"

The guildmaster dashed towards the Magic Stone Soldiers with a huge smile on his face.

He reached one of the golems in a blink of an eye and immediately swung his hammer towards it. His speed was incredible, especially for someone wearing full plate armour.

"Hah, these things react slow as hell!"

The dwarf immediately swung his hammer without using any sort of technique or art and delivered a single forceful blow. Despite him choosing not to apply any sort of skill, the strike still looked powerful enough to smash his target's head to pieces

But it didn't.

The noise that the hammer had caused was not that of a smash, but rather, a screech.

"Nuooooooooowaaahhhhh!!"

The mallet-like weapon had ended up being forced to a stop right before it was able to make contact with the enemy golem. Gamud was sent flying, four spells on his tail. Fortunately, Phillip managed to block them before they caused him any harm.

"Are you alright, Guildmaster?"

"Ugh... The hell just happened...?"

Gamud seemed pretty confused, which, to be fair, made sense given how far he'd been blown away. The counterattack he'd been hit by was incredibly powerful, as evidenced by the huge dent in his orihalcum armour.

It was a bit unfortunate for him, but we still managed to get something out of it. Namely, Forrund seemed to have figured something out.

“Reflection.”

“Oh, that does seem fairly likely now that you’ve mentioned it.”

Amanda acknowledged the other A ranked adventurer’s muttering with an enlightened, knowing tone.

“I think there was a moonlight spell that did something like that. I’ve seen someone use it once before”

“Same.”

Apparently, Moonlight Magic was a branch of magic that specialized in reflecting and invalidating enemy attacks. The Magic Stone Soldiers had already demonstrated that they were capable of all sorts of rare magic, so it actually seemed quite likely for them to be able to use Moonlight Magic as well. The specific behaviour that the golems seemed to be demonstrating was reflection against close ranged attacks and invalidation of longer ranged ones.

Holy shit that stuff is rare though. Like, damn, neither Forrund nor Amanda had seen it more than just once despite their long careers.

“It might be better for us to try wiping out the ones in the rear before attacking the one up front.”

“Agreed.”

We tried following Amanda’s suggestion, but it didn’t work out.

Colbert and Phillip were both immediately blown back the moment they tried engaging one of the golems in the back. In other words, all five units were capable of using Moonlight Magic.

The golems’ stats didn’t seem all that high, but the properties of their spells made them incredibly difficult to deal with.

“So, anyone here know how to deal with this?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s probably not all that easy for them to keep reflecting and invalidating our attacks, so it should show a few openings if we just keep attacking them. Let’s try pelting it with weaker hits for now, ones that wouldn’t really hurt you much when reflected.”

“I see. That does sound rather promising.”

Phillip immediately stepped up for the job. He was wearing a tonne of heavy armour and looked like he could tank as many weaker hits as he wanted.

And so, the experiment commenced. He threw a chain of light stabs at the golems, only to find that one in every few attacks would end up actually hitting its mark. The issue was that the Magic Stone Soldiers were fairly durable, so they didn’t end up taking any noticable damage.

Any attack that was strong enough to take the golems down would likely result in at least a few broken bones if reflected. And of course, that applied just as much to Colbert and Gamud as it did to Phillip.

We decided that we could probably join in as well. We wouldn’t run into any issues so long as I kept our magic barriers up at max while Fran lightly slashed the Magic Stone Soldiers over and over.

We figured that the reflection spell might not actually activate if our attacks were too weak, so Fran ended up using as much force as she could while making sure to stay within the Magical Barrier’s defensible limits.

And so, with that condition in mind, we rapidly assaulted the closest enemy rear guard whilst completely ignoring all its counters.

The act led us to hear a series of ringing sounds followed by a loud smack.

I guess that means we hit it. Wait... what?

“Huh?”

The familiar sensation of absorbing a magic stone ran through me as the magic stone soldier we hit just flat out poofed.

Ohhhh, I get it. These things are literally soldiers made out of magic stones, which meant I could basically just absorb them as I could any other magic stones. Is this how life feels on easy mode or something? On well, either way, it seemed like I was pretty much the Magic Stone Soldier’s natural predator.

“Woah. What did you just do, Miss Fran?”

“You totally obliterated it in just one hit? Damn.”

“What sort of action did you perform?”

Oh shit. They totally just saw me absorb the magic stone soldiers. Crap, I need to come up with an excuse. I really don’t want to be telling everyone that it was one of my abilities. I didn’t want Forrund taking interest in me, so yeah... I guess we could just say it was because of a skill or something, but I’m not really sure if that’ll fly...

“Come on guys, asking other people about their skills is bad manners.”

“Well, true, but...”

“All that matters is that Fran has a way to beating these things with relative ease.”

“I guess you’re right...”

Luckily, Amanda managed to bail us out.

“In that case, I think it’d be best for us to provide Miss Fran with backup while she eliminates them.”

“Yeah.”

“Acknowledged.”

It didn’t take long for us to dispose of the remaining golems. The task went by

especially quickly because the people helping us were so ridiculously strong. They easily held the Magic Stone Soldiers attention as I quickly absorbed them all.

It only took us three minutes to finish off all five Magic Stone Soldiers. Each yielded about three hundred Magic Stone Points, so I ended up getting approximately a thousand five hundred in total. I even managed to get my hands on Ice/Snow Magic, Lava Magic, and Moonlight Magic as a bit of an added bonus.

Man, that went so well. felt like I was working some sort of super well paying job or something like that.

Gaining all those magic stone points did wonders for my self evolution skill. Things were looking up.

Self Evolution: Rank 11. Magic Stone Points: 4486/6000 Memory: 100 Spendable Points: 2

Each golem being three hundred points meant that they were worth roughly the same as B ranked magic beasts.

“Alright. That’s over with. We’d best move onto investigating the Alchemist’s Guild’s interior.”

“Good idea. Might still be something in there.”

CHAPTER 136

ZERAIS' AMBITION

We immediately started investigating the Alchemist's Guild after defeating the Magic Stone Soldiers that emerged from within it. I was honestly left blown aback by the fact that it was basically completely devoid of human life. In fact, the only living things we ever came across were the occasional mouse or roach.

It looked most of the alchemists had either been turned into Demonic Beings or killed in experiments' processes. This was further evidenced by the document Zerais had left in the facility's basement. The observation logs there within described the results of administering different dosages and the like. Even a quick glance at the report's contents left me filled with a sense of disgust.

I'd been hoping for him to have left a few magic stones sitting around or something, but much to my disappointment, he hadn't. There wasn't really anything of interest, least not for us, so we quickly grabbed all of Zerais' data before turning heel. We planned to hand it over to Gamud or Eugene a bit later on.

[Hey Urushi, are there any like escape routes or hidden passages around here or anything?]

"Ruff."

[Oh well, too bad...]

"Might I ask how things are progressing on your end, Fran?"

Eugene called out to us and requested a quick update.

"Got documents."

"I see. The same goes for myself."

The Adventurer's Guild's alchemist continued to look around with a grim look on his face. My guess was that he was probably feeling the weight of his disciple's sins.

“Can use them to figure something out?”

“To an extent. However, I do believe that it’s possible for Zerais to have intentionally left these documents behind as they’d provide only a miniscule amount of knowledge.”

“Intentionally?”

“Precisely. None of the documents I came across contained any sort of key information regarding his processes. Hence, they leaves me unable to reproduce the results he’s managed to derive. The only useful information his files contain are pertinent to the conclusions drawn. There’s also just enough data left in order to evidence his conclusions’ validity.”

Ahhh, I get it now. Zerais wanted his name to be known across the land. Hence, his personality probably led him to leave just enough data behind to show off his efforts.

“This document on Magic Stone Soldiers is a prime example of what I mean to say. It states that employing the use of evil energies can allow one to engrave a single spell upon the magic stone that serves as the soldier’s core. It makes no further mention of the processes involved and hence does not provide one with enough information to recreate his work. That said though, the information presented is not required for his documents to prove his point, seeing as how the end result, the Magic Stone Soldiers, had only recently engaged us in combat.”

Eugene quickly glanced at another one of the documents he grabbed, and found it to be rather similar. It described that different humans being would require magic stones imbedded in different locations, a fact that our experience with them had solidified. That, however, was basically all the document said. It didn’t tell us how to actually figure out where to put the magic stone, nor did it describe the embedding process.

“This?”

“That one... seems to describe a weapon constructed of magic stones... Hmm...”

Fran handed the document we found over and had Eugene quickly look over it. Apparently, it contained information about something that was kind of just a little bit dangerous.

The weapons described in the document were unlike the usual in the sense that they didn't simply use the magic stones embedded in them as a source of fuel. Instead, they allowed the wielder to use the spells sealed inside of them. Moreover was the fact that they were expendable as opposed to long lasting. The most intimidating part of it all was that they could even store extra skills and unique skills, and hence, were hella useful even if only usable once.

"Zerais was... ever so talented. If only he could have used his abilities to better the world and the lives of its people..."

Eugene's face was distorted with a look of lament.

"Magic stone weapon. Seems amazing."

"I agree. It's applicabilities are boundless."

We suddenly felt a presence appear behind us immediately after Eugene finished speaking.

"Thief God's Grace."

"!!"

[Who the hell!?!]

Seriously, what!? There hadn't been anything there just a second ago.

Fran immediately reacted by swinging me to her rear, but she wasn't the only one to act. The person behind her also started to give off an incredible amount of magical energy.

I immediately deployed my Magic Barrier at full power as Fran turned around and faced our foe.

The person that'd been standing behind us was none other than the guy whose looks pissed me off to no end.

Zerais.

How the hell? Wait, I recalled him saying “Thief God’s Grace,” so he’d probably used a skill. Its name gave way to the fact that it was most likely derived from being the recipient of Divine Protection.

“Ooookay. I’ll be taking this back now, thanks.”

Zerais was smiling a prince-like smile despite the fact that I’d chopped off one of his arms. He raised his remaining hand and dangled a bottle as if to show it off to Fran.

“Mmph. How?”

[What? That’s impossible! That should’ve been inside my dimensional storage!]

The thing Zerais was holding was the bottle that contained the Root of Arcane Souls.

“Fmmph!”

“Ahahahha, oh come on, no need for you to be looking at me like that.”

“Mmph, can’t cut.”

“That would be because he’s already turned into an illusion.”

“Woah, that was close. I probably would’ve been split in half if I teleported even just a moment later.”

I ended up passing through nothing but thin air. Zerais himself had already disappeared. He’d instead been replaced by a hologram without any physical substance identical to the one we saw in front of the guild.

“Seriously though, just who are you? You came out of nowhere, completely messed up my plans, and even managed to completely obliterate all my Magic Stone Soldiers with ease. You know how frustrated all that’s been making me? I mean, I may not look it, but I sure am.”

“Just black cat clan, D ranked adventurer. Fran.”

“Ahahaha! Nice one, nice one. You know I made it so that those magic stone soldiers were supposed to have the evil energies inside of them swell up and explode if you hit

them the wrong way, right? There's no way for a D ranked adventurer to be able to completely wipe out all that evil energy in an instant, you know?"

"Did anyway."

"I started following you around the moment you started fighting them so I could steal this little thing back from you, but you defeated them right away and didn't show even the slightest opening. Course, I followed you after too, but you still never showed any openings at all no matter what. I ended up having to trade you one of my arms for it, but I did manage to get what I needed, so it's fine I guess."

"Took, how?"

"Oh you know, I decided to use a Magic Stone Weapon. It let me use the Thief God's Grace, which is a skill that'll let you steal anything from anyone so long as they're within the skill's area of effect. All the data I've got on you seemed to be pointing to the fact that you could use space/time magic, so I assumed you had a dimensional storage. Man, you know, I really would've had to give up if I didn't have the Thief God's Grace with me. Oh yeah, and the reason I could follow you without you noticing me is cause I was using a Magic Stone Weapon with the Perfect Invisibility skill sealed inside of it, yup."

The pendant that'd been resting on top of Zerais' severed arm cracked and shattered into several pieces. So that's a Magic Stone Weapon? Okay yeah, it's just as I suspected. Those things are ridiculous as hell, even if limited to being one time use.

"Aw man, now it and the one with the Thief God's Grace are both all busted up. They cost a hundred million gold in total, you know? They were supposed to be my trump cards."

"Wanted item that badly?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. You know, I actually really want to thank you. I probably never would've been able to get my hands on it if you hadn't taken it from those god damned pirates. Man, I went through soooo much trouble for all this stuff. Thank you so much! I won't have to write off any of my plans anymore after all."

"And just what precisely is that supposed to be, Zerais?"

Eugene finally joined in on the conversation after staying silent throughout. It seemed that he was genuinely curious as to the identity the soul contained within the bottle.

“Oh man, not even you knew, Master? Hehehe, it’s a Chimera’s Arcane Soul. Surprised? I bet you are.”

“T-That’s preposterous. D-Did you just say a Chimera?”

“Rare?”

“The word rare doesn’t even begin to describe it. There are rumoured to be less than five Chimeras throughout the world. They’re so dangerous that they’re all supposed to have been sealed away.”

“Ahahaha! See, I knew you’d be surprised. Isn’t this thing just great? I requested it from the Reidosian Alchemy Lab by using the Barbra Guild’s name and all that. It ended up costing me a whole billion! Man, you know much money a billion is? Actually, it wasn’t even my money, so I don’t really care. But man, it was one hell of a snag!”

“Just what are you trying to accomplish?”

“Oh you know, I’m just going to be making the strongest magic beast ever. The final product should hopefully be strong enough to destroy the entire world!”

Holy crap. That item was way more than I’d thought it was.

“Anyway, I’ve met all my goals, so I’ll actually be bidding you farewell for real this time. Buh bye!”

“Wait, hold on! Zerais!”

Eugene yelled his disciple’s name at the top of his lungs, but the other man was long gone.

“Zerais...”

“Chimera is what?”

“Ah, right. Chimeras are the most powerful artificial magic beasts known to man.”

Apparently, they were something made in an experiment involving mixing many different kinds of magic beasts together.

Chimeras were considered biological weapons ranked A or higher. The researchers that made the first hadn't expected it to be as powerful as it was, and thus, they ended up losing control of it. The escaped subject had ultimately ended up completely ravaging several cities.

The researchers continued to churn them out in while also attempting to actually take control of them, but it turned out to be an impossible task. Several countries ultimately ended up falling to the experiment's products, and thus, all the world's governments ended up coming to conclusion that further research on the topic should be banned, and that all existing Chimeras should be sealed away. The researchers' data was destroyed, and they themselves executed.

Creating a Chimera took ridiculously pricey materials, some of which came from creatures that had long gone extinct. It should've theoretically been impossible for anyone to get their hands on a Chimera given the current circumstances, but apparently it seemed that wasn't the case...

"As of right now, the Kingdom of Reidos is a mess. Someone may have used the country's state of turmoil in order to steal the Chimera whilst not knowing the danger posed by their actions."

"A mess?"

That's the first time I've heard that. Then again, I didn't really know much about Reidosians. The only thing I did know was that I'd already started thinking of all Reidosians as my enemies.

"The Reidosian King died a sudden death approximately ten years ago. Four of the country's archdukes have been wrestling for control through military means ever since. The country has almost fallen into one in a state of civil war. I'm honestly quite surprised to say that it hasn't."

"Understood."

Hmmm, could that mean that Salrut and the Lich were both products of one of those

archduke's ploys? Or were they potentially products of them all scheming against one another? I wanted more information, but it seemed that Eugene had already told us everything he knew.

"I'm going to go report everything that has happened to both the Lord and the Adventurer's Guild. Any matter involving a Chimera is of utmost importance, after all."

It seemed like Zerais was going to have his name plastered on wanted posters all around the world. Chances were that he was probably actually going to be pretty happy about that, but it couldn't really be helped. I agreed that dealing with him was indeed a matter of utmost importance.

We couldn't find any additional clues, so we decided to give up and regroup with Amanda for the time being.

CHAPTER 137

THE CONTEST'S WHEREABOUTS

“And here’s your order.”

“Be careful, it’s hot!”

“Nn.”

Today was the day after the incident. Err, technically, it was still the same day seeing as how everything happened after midnight, but yeah, whatever.

We were going around with our stall and handing away our products away for free, well, kind of. Brabra’s lord had technically bought us out in advance, so we were still making bank.

Zerais had gotten away, but naturally, the city’s problems hadn’t upped and vanished with him. We ended up having to go around hunting Evil and Demonic Beings all night. I think we managed to get around ten or so ourselves. The most successful hunter had been Forrund, who had netted himself a whole twenty kills. Our efforts had allowed the city had regain its usual tranquility by sunrise.

Unfortunately, the population had taken a pretty big hit. Lots of people died. Those that had survived were left in a state of confusion as a result of last night’s events. Thus, the cooking contest had naturally been cancelled. The Chef’s Guild needed to sort itself out and identify all its corrupt members and whatnot before proceeding with its festivities.

That said, a complete and utter shut down would likely lead Brabra’s citizens to feel uneasy about the city’s state of affairs. The lord had wanted to prevent the city from adopting a negative atmosphere, and so, he had asked the contests’ participants to push their stalls around town and give out their products for free.

We didn’t really mind going along with his request. We had a tonne of curry bread left lying around, and apparently we were going to get cash out of helping out, so why not, right? It seemed that most of the other contestants had felt the same, as they’d also

willingly assented.

“Hey! No fighting over there! We still have lots in stock, so calm yourselves down!”

“Would anyone like to try the dish that might just have ended up winning the contest? If so, then line yourselves right up!”

[Alright, why don't we try moving along and heading over to the next area?]

The three girls we hired were helping us move the stall around. I'd originally been planning to have Urushi do it, but the lord had ended up advising otherwise. He told us that Urushi would end up scaring the citizens because of how large, fearsome, and potentially unsanitary he looked.

Hey! Urushi has feelings too, you know? He's totally feeling down cause of all that.

Our second idea was to have Fran do it, but the three salesgirls had stated that they, as adults, couldn't stand to let a child do physical labour in their presence while they did nothing. Hence, they ended up doing it instead despite being much weaker than her.

[The lord told us to visit as many places as we could, so, yeah.]

“Nn.”

Phillip had told us a few things before we ended up setting out. According to him, this whole free food thing was apparently the Krysten family giving back to the citizens what it could before it was deprived the ability. Most of their wealth was probably going to end up being confiscated, and hence, they were spending as much of it on helping Barbra's people before it was all taken away. Apparently, they were more or less guaranteed to at least be relieved of their positions. The merits they'd accumulated over the last three hundred years were significant, but they weren't enough to make up for an incident as big as the one that'd occurred last night.

They'd sent a magistrate to the capital, and ordered him to report everything that had occurred. Hence, they were expecting the King to get in touch with them within a few days. I honestly had to say that both the Lord and Phillip, his eldest son, were good people. They were honest, and upright. Their only faults were that they were a bit too soft on those they held dear.

He'd also told us about the fates that befell those that a hand in the crime. Apparently, everyone that Bluke had hired would end up being beheaded. The people that had been forced into cooperating would be made into crime slaves and sent off to Goldishia or the mines. Both locations involved them serving fixed terms.

I understood the whole mine thing, but I had no idea what he meant by Goldishia, so naturally, I had Fran ask him a bit about it.

Apparently, it was the name of the continent destroyed by Trismegistus. It was covered by a large barrier, but not actually completely sealed off. The barrier only covered the continent's center. There were still a few places outside of it that could sustain human life.

The people who still lived on the Goldishian continent were mostly Dragonfolk. They were aware of the sins shouldered by their predecessors, and thus, they spent their days repenting by entering the great barrier and fighting the Abyss Eater. It seemed that the barrier had been made so that people could enter and leave it at will. The Abyss Eater, however, was unable to escape it.

The Dragonfolk had the world behind them. Every single nation offered them support in the form of both soldiers and supplies. Crime slaves were often sent over as well so that they could be put to use in the form of meat shields.

Wait, wouldn't the death penalty actually just be better at that point?

It turned out that the answer to my question was no. Some crime slaves would actually manage to endure Goldishia's harsh conditions, survive, level up, and attain freedom. Hence, it was still technically better than just flat out getting executed.

Speaking of which, some of the cooking guild's top brass had ended up getting turned into crime slaves. They'd been judged to be at fault for not properly appraising Waint's cooking. Bluke had been threatening them, so it wasn't entirely fault, but they could've prevented an incredible amount of damage had they chosen to do their jobs properly.

[You think this city's still going to be alright from here on out? The Alchemist's Guild is gone, the Lord's going to get forced to retire, and a good chunk of the population's just flat out dead.]

“Worried about orphanage.”

[I think they’ll be fine. Amanda’s got their backs.]

“Nn. Right. Amanda, not type of person to let children be sad.”

[Honestly, I’m more worried about the Chef’s Guild than the orphanage. It looks like they might end up completely collapsing at this rate.]

“!!”

Fran’s eyes suddenly shot open in response to my words.

[Hey uh, you alright? Is something wrong?]

“No finals if no contest...”

[Well, yeah.]

“Can’t force feed him curry!”

[Ahh, you mean that one old due? Yeah.]

“Managed to escape!”

[Well uh, it’s technically not his fault, so escape might not really be the right word.]

Yeaaaah, I totally forgot about him. I wonder if he’s doing alright. I mean, I thought he was a pretty good guy, so I hope he didn’t end up getting caught in this whole mess.

Wait, did we just end up raising a flag or something? He literally showed up right in front of the stall as we finished moving it and started setting it up again. His face was coated with its usual frown. I couldn’t immediately tell what he was up to, but soon realized that he was waiting for us to finish our preparations. The way he stared at us almost made it seem like he was trying to tell us to hurry the hell up.

“Mmph.”

“I’ve come to try your dish.”

“Will make you break down into tears.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

The man’s frown broke into a fearless smile.

Judith seemed to be taken aback by the sudden event. Lydia, on the other hand, appeared to have caught on, as her eyes were sparkling with a weird sense of anticipation. I couldn’t really tell what Maia was feeling at all. Maia was typically all smiles, but interestingly enough, she was actually the hardest of the bunch to read. She completely trumped the not-actually-emotionless Lydia.

The old man took his first bite out of a piece of plain curry bread approximately ten minutes later. His location hadn’t really changed much, he was still standing right beside the stall.

“Oh?”

Damn, I’m starting to get all nervous. I was pretty confident in the dish’s taste seeing as I’d tried it myself and all, but, I was no gourmet. I had no idea as to how he’d feel about it.

“Hmm.”

“Well?”

“I very much regret the fact that I’m unable to stuff myself with as much of this as I’d like.”

Wait, does that mean he liked it?

“The fried breading provides an excellent sense of texture, thereby deepening the dish’s taste and pushing it over the edge. The filling is obviously the very same curry that you had me consume upon our last meeting, but I can taste that its recipe has been slightly adjusted for it better fit with bread that encloses it. As a result, the sauce and its container serve to amplify each other’s tastes and deliver a final product far beyond the sum of its ingredients. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this very recipe has earned its right as one that functions as a milestone in cooking’s history.

Please do tell your master that I found it to be a wonderful dish with a unique, thorough flavour.”

He totally just gave the type of speech you’d normally see in a food journal! Shit, he totally praised the hell out of me!

“Nn. Will tell.”

“I’d also like to say that I’m sorry that the contest ended up the way it did.”

“Nn? Not guild’s fault.”

“Even so, I’d like to apologize regardless. Many of our members were responsible for the incident. I’m absolutely certain that your dish would’ve allowed you to make it to the finals.”

Huh, this old guy’s actually pretty honourable. It looked like he visited us for the sole sake of fulfilling his promise.

“I’d like to retract my words. Your master is a wonderful cook, and this dish of his is absolutely delicious.”

“Heheh”

Come on Fran, this is where you’re supposed to say “”Don’t worry about it,”” instead of getting all cocky you know? Well, the old guy didn’t really seem to mind, so it’s fine I guess.

Man, I’m tired. I feel like taking a nice, long break after we’re done giving out all this curry bread. Man, worrying about pickpockets, taking curry bread out from my dimensional storage, and all that other random stuff I did sure was exhausting. I know what you’re thinking, but I swear I am actually tired, okay?

Wait, where’d all these people come from? Why the hell is the line so long?

I guess that old dude must’ve been a local celebrity or something. Everyone in line immediately started talking about how he praised us.

“Huuuh? How’d the line suddenly get this much longer?”

“There’s way too many people here.”

“I guess they must all be attracted to my beauty.”

Welp, looks like I’m not getting that break any time soon.

CHAPTER 138

I WANT MAGIC STONES

“I would like to offer you my thanks in return for your assistance.”

“Nn.”

Phillip stopped by not too long after we finished handing out curry bread and whatnot. It was a bit late, so Urushi had actually long passed out inside of Fran’s shadow. That said though, we decided to let the knight in anyways seeing as how he came out of his way to visit us and all that.

At first, I’d been a bit surprised to see that he was unguarded, but quickly rationalized it. Phillip was incredibly strong, so to him, guards were more of a luxury than necessity. It was only natural for him to come alone given how short the city currently was on manpower.

The first thing he did after arriving was hand Fran a box whose sides measured about thirty centimeters each. The wooden container was black, but not unnaturally so. It seemed to be made out of ebony.

“This is your reward. We would have hosted a grand ceremony in recognition of your efforts, but our current circumstances unfortunately do not allow for it.”

“Don’t mind. Don’t want to stand out anyways.”

“I am glad that is how you feel about the matter. The magistrate stated that he would like for us to minimize any and all publicity related to last night’s incident.”

A scandal involving a marquis was pretty much as big a thing as a scandal involving the entire nation served by said marquis, so chances were, the country wanted to make this whole fiasco seem as small scale as possible.

In fact, they were so keen on restricting knowledge on the event’s details that they weren’t even actually going to announce that the Krystens were actually responsible for the incident. Or rather, they couldn’t.

The lord's household had heavily involved themselves in cleaning up after last night's events. They had not only kept crime at a minimum in the disaster's aftermath but also generously compensated Barbra's people for their losses. Announcing that they were at fault for the incident would result in a loss of trust, and thereby cause the current state of affairs to degenerate into a downwards spiral. That, in the country's eyes, was a scenario they wished to avoid at all cost. In other words, the country had decided not to punish the Krystens. Instead, it tasked them with restoring Barbra to its former glory.

"My father and I had planned to make our sins public knowledge, but we as nobles cannot go against the court's wishes. It is unfortunate, but we cannot announce my brothers' sins either."

"To Bluke. What happened?"

"Neither Bluke nor Waint are human any longer. They have both lost the ability to reason, and thus, we've no choice but to put them to death. We have yet to determine the precise method of execution, but I have no doubt that they will soon pay for their sins. As we cannot inform the citizens of our wrongdoings, we will announce their official cause of death to be illness."

Yeah, I figured something like that'd happen.

Phillip's expression turned a bit sour as he discussed Waint and Bluke. He seemed troubled. My guess was that he still loved both his brothers despite their actions and current states.

"I apologize, but we cannot publicly credit you for Bluke's arrest."

"Don't really mind."

I mean, we got rewarded anyways, so who cares?

Phillip seemed really apologetic about the lack of credit we'd get throughout his visit, but we honestly would've rejected any ceremonies or parades or anything like that anyways. In fact, we very much preferred him doing things the way he did.

"Master. Will open now."

[Go for it. I'm pretty curious about what they gave us.]

Fran opened her reward shortly after Phillip's departure, only to find it full of valuables.

The first thing to catch my eye was a stack of gold coins that added up to a whole million Golde in total. The rest of the box was pretty much filled to the brim with jewelry. We'd gone into this whole thing thinking we'd be working for free, so we were pretty damn happy about getting rewarded, especially with so much cash.

[Coming to Barbra sure has made us a lot of bank.]

"Nn. Can buy lots."

[Yeah. Were you thinking of buying anything in particular? Like food or something?]

"Want that too. But not what was in mind."

Wait, Fran wants something other than food? That's rare. Is she finally going to buy herself something all cute and girly-like? Or maybe some fancy clothing?

Okay, yeah no.

"Will buy magic stones."

[Huh? Magic stones?]

"Nn. Will buy magic stones for Master to absorb. Aiming for rank up. Barbra should have lots."

[You sure?]

The thought of buying magic stones for the sake of absorption was something that weighed on my conscience. It just kinda felt like all the money we made belonged to Fran. The same went with potions, armour, materials, and all that stuff too. She'd take all that, while I'd take the magic stones. That was just how I had it sorted out in my head.

Though, I did understand that me getting stronger was equivalent to her getting stronger, so it wasn't exactly like I was actually depriving her of funds for no benefit or anything like that.

Besides, I did figure that this would end up happening in due time anyways.

In fact, I'd always thought that we would probably end up having to become a rather aggressive buyer of magic stones. Each consecutive rank up required more magic stones than the last. Powering me up was ultimately going to end up getting a lot harder down the line.

"Will sell all unneeded items, buy needed items, then spend rest on magic stones."

[I guess that works. We'd probably be able to get a pretty big variety if we asked both the Adventurer's Guild and the Luciel Conglomerate.]

Ideally, I'd prefer if we could get our hands on magic stones from either higher ranked monsters or monsters whose magic stones we'd yet to obtain.

Welp, I guess it's time to sell all the stuff we don't need that's piled up in storage.

"Thanks for waiting. Here's what we owe you, we'll be bringing the merchandise you requested out shortly."

"Nn."

We dropped by the Luciel Conglomerate in order to get rid of all the junk we still had on hand. We sold off all our weaker equips, our spare magic items, and even all the random jewelry we happened to have on hand. We'd actually just finished doing something similar at the adventurer's guild as well. There, we sold off all the random magic beast parts we weren't planning on using. We actually had quite a bit piled up in storage, so yeah.

Of course, we had bought all the stuff we needed as well. Our inventory ended up looking like this:

Phantom Pyroxene (Magic Sword)
Deathgaze (Magic Sword)
Mysterious Item Bag
Highest Grade Life Potion x 3
High Grade Life Potion x 5
Panacea x 3
High Grade Mana Potion x 3
Mid Grade Mana Potion x 5
Highest Grade Alchemy Potion x 3
High Grade Potion of Repair x 1
Potion of Rising Skill x 1
Anti-Side Effect Potion x 3
Lots of Ingredients
Camping Supplies
Corpses
Poisoned Water

At first, we weren't actually all that sure whether or not we wanted to sell the Aidoneus' Mantle or the Serpent King's Short Sword. But after mulling over it a bit, we ultimately ended up deciding to get rid of them.

Whew, emptying out our inventory made me feel all refreshed.

The two equips we bought were the Bracelet of Herculean Strength and the Mage's Necklace. The former increase the STR stat by twenty, and the latter provided a bit of a boost to magic. Fran's current equips were:

Black Cat Set
Bracelet of Herculean Strength
Bracelet of Substitution
Mage's Necklace

We ended up having about four and a half million Golde on hand even after buying two new equips.

That said though, my sense of value is getting really screwy. I actually ended up thinking that the bracelet we bought was rather cheap despite it costing a million and two hundred thousand.

[I guess we'll be spending the rest on magic stones.]

“Nn.”

“So about those magic stones you wanted...”

Hmm, Captain Rengil’s all hesitating and stuff. Looks like they probably won’t be willing to sell us any.

“Barbra’s currently experiencing a major shortage of magic stones.”

“Why?”

“The Alchemist’s Guild was buying them all up. We’ve very few D ranked stones, even.”

“Still have some?”

“A few, but they all belong to either Gullinburstis or Apis, and I recall you saying that you had no interest in either.”

So they basically only have stuff you can get locally?

“The supply shortage has caused the price to skyrocket too. They’re going for nearly twice as much as usual right now.”

God damn it Zerais! You son of a bitch! Fuck, you owe us way more than just one arm. Curse you, asshole!

(What now?)

[Uhhh, well, there isn’t really anything to do.]

The Adventurer’s Guild had a policy against selling magic stones to anything but other organisations. The only place in Barbra we could actually try was really just the Luciel Conglomerate. So uh, yeah. We were pretty much dead out of luck.

“The only other magic stones we happen to have in stock are scrap stones.”

“Scrap stones?”

“The term refers to magic stones that come from Goblins, Fanged Mice, and other magic beasts ranked at G or lower.”

“Have those in stock?”

“We do. The magic stone shortage has actually lasted for quite some time, so we bought them in order to experiment with them, but we couldn’t find any use for them, so they’ve more or less just been sitting there.”

(Master?)

[Sounds good to me.]

Goblins had all sorts of skills, so I didn’t see any harm in going through with the purchase.

We ended up buying a total of two hundred scrap stones, alongside fifteen slightly better stones that I hadn’t absorbed before. We had no idea what skills they contained, but honestly, it didn’t really matter. They were worth their weight in magic stone points anyways.

“You sure you want these? They’re scrap stones, you know?”

“Don’t mind.”

“Alright then. I’m honestly thankful you’re taking these off my hands, so I’ll throw in a bit of a bonus.”

We ended up a total of a hundred thousand Golde on magic stones. Apparently, their prices didn’t really start skyrocketing till they hit rank D. Magic stones of rank E or lower were typically used for everyday commodities and stuff, so they were still rather cheap. Even the most expensive magic stone, one that came from an Ice Rock Apis, only ended up costing us three thousand Golde.

I immediately started absorbing them after we got back to the inn.

“Master. Ready.”

[Oh hell yeah! Hnnnnnnnnngggg!!]

I had Fran pour all the magic stones she got into an empty bathtub and dived straight in the moment it was ready.

So you might be wondering to yourself, what the hell is that damn sword doing?

Well you see, the answer is... taking a magic stone bath. You know how like, people that suddenly got super rich would start bathing in their cash? Yeah, this is that, but with magic stones instead of dollar bills.

Hot damn! I'm completely immersed in magic stones. This. Is. Bliss.

"Master, having fun?"

[Hell yeah I am! Yahoooooo!!!]

Absorbing magic stones one at a time would've ended up being a huge pain in the ass, so I ended up coming up with this method for the sake of efficiency.

Fuck, this is amazing! I feel filthy fucking rich! This is what it's like to be loaded! Shit, I'm feeling like some snobby ass douche right now, but who cares!!"

[Yeaaaaa boiiiiiii!!!]

Even the slightest bit of movement causes me to absorb the magic stones around me. I can feel their power flowing into me. Hnnnnngg!

And so, ten minutes passed.

"Master..."

"Woof..."

[Mah bad...]

I realized only after the fact that I'd done something unbecoming. I was supposed to be Fran's guardian, so acting like that wasn't exactly the best idea. Man, Damn it, now their gazes have gone cold. They're both looking at me like I'm some weirdo. Stop it Fran, Urushi! Your eyes burn!!

[Y-You guys want anything? Feel free not to hold back.]

“...All you can eat curry. 1 week.”

“Woof”

[S-Sure why not.]

“Nn.”

“Woof.”

Alright, I’m going to need to be a responsible adult. Time to get my dignity as a guardian back.

[I-I ended up getting about seven hundred magic stone points.]

“Decent amount.”

“Woof!”

My stats had changed as follows.

Self Evolution

Rank 11

Magic Stone Points: 5169/6600

Memory: 100

Spendable Points: 2

New Skills

Detect Malice: Lv 1

Evil Sword Techniques: Lv 1

Illusion Magic: Lv 1

Thin Sword Techniques: Lv 1

Thin Sword Arts: Lv 1

Staff Techniques: Lv 1

Okay yup, it’s not working. Their gazes are still all chilly.

[S-So, how about paying the Prince and Princess a quick visit before we set off for Ulmutt?]

“Agreed,”

[Alright, let’s go!]

“Nn.”

“Woof!”

Whew, I think they’re both back to normal now.

The two turned around the moment the thought crossed my mind. Both Fran and Urushi tilted their heads and looked up at me, their actions in perfect sync. It almost looked like they’d planned it out ahead of time.

“No forgetting about all you can eat curry.”

“Woof woof.”

[Yes ma’am.]

CHAPTER 139

NEXT NEXT DESTINATION.

“Is that really what happened?”

“Nn.”

“That’s quite amazing, Fran.”

We were currently inside of Rhodas’ manor.

That said, we naturally weren’t actually visiting him. We’d come to see the prince and princess.

It turned out that we weren’t the only ones getting ready to leave the city. Flut and his party were also packing up and getting ready to head back to their country. Their ship was to set sail tomorrow.

“Did you see any of the monstrosities?”

“I did.”

“Did you fight them?”

“Defeated easily.”

“That’s awesome! Man, Fran, you’re so cool!”

Fran, the prince, the princess, and the former slaves had gotten together for a tea party.

The children were delighted at the fact that we’d provided them snacks in the form of curry bread.

“Are you not going to come with us, Fran?”

One of the former slave asked her in a bit of a hopeful tone, but she responded to him

with a shake of her head.

“Already decided where to go.”

“Come on, can’t you just change your mind and join us in serving the prince?”

“Need to go.”

“Yeah, but we’ve finally started getting along...”

“Yeah, he’s right!”

“Let’s not pressure Fran any further. I’m sure she has her reasons and circumstances.”

“That’s right. Besides, it isn’t as if we won’t ever see each other again.”

Flut and Satia somehow managed to calm the other children down.

“I do understand how you all feel. I’d love for her to come with us as well. In fact, I’ve even considered offering to hire her as our guard once more. I’d also considered offering her a permanent, high paying position.”

“Then w-”

“But I decided against it. I’ve decided not to make use of royal position.”

One of the children tried to protest, but Flut quickly cut him off by raising his voice while shaking his head.

“Because I would then lose the ability to call her my friend.”

“We would much rather be Fran’s friends than her superiors. If we employed her, we’d no longer be able to call her our equal.”

The children fell silent in response to the prince and princess’ proclamations. They seemed to have understood and accepted the twins’ opinions.

Fran looked rather pleased to hear their choices. Her expression hadn’t changed, but both her ears were happily twitching away, so it was rather easy for me to read her.

However, the children seemed to have felt that they'd been scolded, and hence, an unpleasant atmosphere soon filled the room. Luckily though, Serid bailed us out of the situation by bringing in a few sweet treats. He also helped perk everyone up by telling us about the recent failures experienced by the children during their training sessions.

The children's moods were soon restored, and hence, they ended up chatting the entire day away. The sun had started setting before we'd even realised it.

We wanted to stick around a bit longer, but Serid informed us that Flut and Satia unfortunately had other responsibilities to attend to.

"I apologize for interrupting your conversation, but it has come time for your appointment with the Magistrate, your Highnesses."

"Is it really that time already?"

"We had so much fun that the day almost seemed to pass in the blink of an eye."

Both twins promptly accepted their duties; neither Flut nor Satia had voiced that they wished the delay the appointment. I was amazed at how they were already able to immediately prioritize their royal obligations over their personal interests.

"It is unfortunate, but we have an meeting to attend. We must depart for it immediately."

"We still have tea and sweets readily available, so please feel free to stay as long as you'd like, Fran."

"I unfortunately have to object to that. There is in fact an envoy here for Miss Fran as well."

"Envoy?"

"I named him an envoy, but the individual in question is in fact the Master of Barbra's Adventurer's Guild. He has just finished meeting with the Sir Rhodas and the Magistrate. Guildmaster Gamud immediately stated that he would like to meet with you upon hearing that you were currently at this residence."

The Guildmaster? Did he need us for anything? I could've sworn we dropped by the

guild already just earlier this morning, but oh well, might as well go see him I guess.

One of the manor's servants led us over to another room upon confirming that we were willing to see the other party.

"There you are, Fran!"

There, we met with the Guildmaster, the buff ass dwarf that'd help us fight off Rynford.

"Sorry for calling you out like that."

"Don't mind."

"Heard that you'd be leaving soon. I wanted to meet with you at least once before you did, but I couldn't really find the time for it because I've been busy with cleaning up after everything that's happened. Caught wind of the fact that you happened to be visiting, so I urged them to lend me a room. Been wanting to thank you, you know? Your actions saved the city."

Gamud got up off the sofa and bowed a deep bow.

"Didn't really save. In fact, was saved. Almost lost against Rynford."

"Forrund and Amanda are the only two that could've possibly beat that thing one on one, so don't sweat it. What matters is that you bought us enough time to arrive. He probably would've spread mass destruction if you didn't manage to stall him. That's why, I'll say it again. Thank you."

"...Nn."

"Gahahaha. All's good so long as you know how grateful we feel."

Fran's expression warped into one that simultaneously expressed both happiness and frustration. If I had to say, it seemed like it was leaning a bit more towards the latter than the former though.

That said, I can't really blame her. I mean, we really did end up losing to Rynford. In fact, recalling our loss is making me feel all frustrated too.

“Nyways, let’s get down to business. I heard that you were looking for magic stones. That true?”

“Still looking.”

“I see... And you’re planning to head to Ulmutt next?”

“Nn.”

“It ain’t going to be too easy for you to get your hands on magic stones over there either, you know?”

“Really?”

“Really. Think bout it this way. Barbra is Kranzel’s second biggest city. All the other nearby cities ship their excess magic stones over to us, so there being none in Barbra means that there ain’t any anywhere else either. Of course, that applies to Ulmutt too. The place really does produce a lot of the stuff, but most of it gets ported right over.”

Wait, seriously? Well, I guess that does kind of make sense. I mean, Barbra’s got a lot of adventurers, but there’s no way they can get enough magic stones to fuel the whole city all by themselves.

It looks like it really is going to be hard for us to get magic stones, even if we do go to Ulmutt.

Gamud produced a folded up a piece of paper from one of his chest pockets as we groaned in response to his words.

“So I’ll give you this.”

Is that... a letter?

“This’ll serve as a letter of introduction. It’ll get you into the auction held in the kingdom’s capital.”

“Auction?”

“Yeah. They hold a huge auction in the capital every June. It’s normally pretty hard to

get yourself through the door, but show this to the staff at the capital's guild branch and they'll let you take part in both the buying and the selling. "

"Sure it's okay to take?"

"Yeah, don't sweat it. Oh, and don't be feeling like you're obligated to participate or anything either. Just do whatever you want, it's just an option now is all. I do think it's a good idea though. Should be able to get a whole bunch of magic stones for cheap if you get lucky."

Looks like we just got our hands on something amazing. The auction sounds like a pretty big event.

"Nn. Will thankfully accept."

"No problem. Glad to be of service."

Welp, I guess we're going then. For some odd reason, we ended up deciding where to go after leaving Ulmutt despite not yet having even set off for Ulmutt.

CHAPTER 140

THE NIGHT BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE

We happened to spot someone standing in front of the inn as we made our way back towards it.

“Colbert?”

“Oh, there you are. Hey.”

“Doing what?”

“I happened to catch wind of the fact that you would soon be leaving the city, so I was thinking of maybe treating you to meal. I’ve got a fairly good restaurant in mind.”

“Nn. Looking forward to it.”

“Please do. I’ve invited the Scarlet Maidens as well. Let’s have ourselves a blast.”

“Nn. Sounds Good.”

“Right, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask. How fares the master? Was he adversely affected by the incident? Did he happen to incur any sort of injury?”

“No problem. Already healed.”

All my injuries pretty much regenerated right way, so I was perfectly fine.

“W-w-w-what?! Is he really alright!? D-Did his injuries have any adverse after effects!? W-w-we need to get him a potion! As high quality a potion as possible!”

Colbert, apparently seemed to think it to be a big deal though, as he grabbed Fran by the shoulders and immediately started shouting. It was an action she probably would’ve hit him for had he not been one of her acquaintances.

“...Nn.”

But since he was, she instead ended up being completely taken aback by his sudden action, and only barely managed to squeeze out a reply.

Right, Colbert was one of my fans for some odd reason.

And, now that I think about it, he's actually helped us out a tonne. He played a huge role in both fighting off magic beasts and helping us with the cooking contest. I'd like to thank him if possible... Hmmm...

(Master?)

[Tell him I'll be joining you guys for two odd hours. I'm planning to tag along with a doppelganger.]

The only problem was that my doppelgangers would always spawn in wearing a t-shirt, a jersey, and a pair of sandals. That said, the aforementioned appearance only something that my doppelgangers had started adopting recently, mostly because I'd finally gotten used to the skill. In the past, I used to spawn in with Fran's cloak, so chances were, the doppelgangers' appearances probably had to do with the skill level and my ability to picture stuff. I do recall the System Announcer spawning in all the clones she summoned with cool looking armour and whatnot, so I should be able to do all that too if I bump the skill level up a bit more.

But either way, I feel like I'd end up disappointing Colbert if I dressed like that. In fact, I kind of doubted that the store would even actually let me in. It'd probably do better for me to stick to the dress code. Wait, would wearing an overcoat work instead? Yeah, I'll probably go with that.

(Got it. Colbert be pleased.)

Colbert's excitement shot through the roof the moment Fran conveyed my intentions to him.

"W-What!? The Master will finally make his advent, you say!?"

"Nn."

"Then I simply cannot settle for taking him to a dining hall in the city's outskirts!"

“Okay to take me there though?”

“I’ve no choice but to use every single connection I have and reserve only the finest restaurant!”

“Doesn’t matter, as long as tasty.”

“I must seek an appropriate restaurant immediately... Wait, no... It would be extremely rude of me to take the world’s greatest chef to a mere restaurant... I must immediately hunt the prey to be used myself... I do recall there being rumours of a dragon nesting in the Cage of the Crystal Tree...”

Holy shit.

The three girls approached as we tried to figure out how to calm him down.

“What’s the matter, Colbert?”

“That’s kinda creepy and gross...”

“The fact that I look up to him as an adventurer makes me kind of want to cry.”

It seemed that throwing them into the mix did the trick, as hearing them all criticize him brought Colbert back to his senses.

“Oh, hey. When did you ladies get here?”

“We’re more interested in what you were up to.”

“Gross.”

“Did something good happen?”

“Yeah! You see...”

Aw crap. Lydia’s question ended up sending Colbert back over the edge.

Luckily, the four girls did ultimately manage to drag him off to the place he’d initially

booked.

And so, thirty minutes passed.

“Nom nom nom nom”

“Well? How is it? Good, right?”

“Mmphnom”

The food appeared incredibly delicious. Fran had shoved ten whole plates down her throat, and had yet to stop.

“Have you heard about the Alchemist’s Guild? It seems that they’re planning to send some staff over from the capital in order to reorganize Barbra’s branch.”

“They used to have priority in the purchase of magic stones, but apparently they’re going to be losing that now. In fact, they’re now going to have restrictions and purchase limits too.”

Yeah, I figured they wouldn’t completely get rid of the Alchemist’s Guild. Barbra was a city in which a vast number of resources were made available. The benefit of having people do research here far outweighed any potential costs.

Besides, the newly placed restrictions should hopefully prevent any similar incidents from ever happening again. Hopefully.

“I’ve also heard that both the lord’s second and third sons died as a result of the incident’s events.”

“Oh, the two idiots, right?”

“I assume they were killed by the monstrosities?”

Huh, I thought Phillip said that they were going to claim that they died from illness? Saying they died in the incident would probably bring pity to the household and kind of rally the people to give the Krysten family their support. Phillip didn’t seem all that willing to do anything like that, so I figure that they probably ended up getting ordered to lie or something.

“It seems like there’s been a lot of rumours flying around even though the whole thing just happened last night.”

“Oh yeah, I heard a few people talking about how they were worried that this was a sign of the Evil God’s revival.”

“I’ve also heard rumours of how another country had been pulling the strings from behind the scenes.”

“There was even a group saying that a demon was responsible for killing all the monstrosities and saving the city.”

“Oh come on, that one’s just flat out impossible. Why would there even be a demon in the city to begin with?”

“That’s kind of just how rumours are.”

The three Scarlet Maidens were trying to kick the conversation into gear through the use of rumours, but Fran was too busy eating to actually pay attention to them. They naturally noticed, but, didn’t really pay it much mind. Instead, they ultimately ended up just awkwardly laughing it off before joining her in gluttony.

And so, the rest of the night pretty much ended up becoming a fatfest.

“This place is fairly famous for its low prices and good food.”

“The meat they sell here is delicious too.”

“I could just keep eating this forever.”

“Oh damn it you three, at least hold back a bit!”

“Free food is always the most delicious food you can get.”

It really did look quite good. The atmosphere was all lively and stuff too, so I kinda wanted to join in. It was about time anyways.

[Fran, it’s time.]

“Getting master. Will be back soon.”

“Please allow me to join you! I simply have to greet him upon his arrival!”

That’s a bit troubling. I’d been planning on using Doppelganger Synthesis just outside the store.

(Teleport.)

[Yeah, I guess I don’t really have any other choice, do I?]

“Bit far away. Will need a minute.”

I teleported a bit away and made a doppelganger. Normally, Fran would be able to teleport us both back, but that didn’t seem to be working. It normally worked because I counted as a piece of equipment, but a humanized doppelganger was uh, kind of not a piece of equipment. Luckily, it didn’t actually really matter because my doppelganger could still use space/time magic anyways.

And so, we teleported back to the restaurant.

I was wearing a large overcoat on top of my jersey and t-shirt. I would’ve immediately been labeled as suspicious back in Japan, but whatever, it was what it was.

“Brought him.”

“Y-Yeah. So he’s...”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Fran’s master.”

“I-It-It’s very nice to meet you too! I’m Colbert, and a huge fan of your cooking. The food you made was exquisite, be it the curry, sushi, or dishes served during the competition. Please allow me to enroll as one of your disciples!”

“Sorry.”

“He was refused immediately!”

Errrr, I was not expecting him to ask that, especially not right off the bat. Crap, did that mess up the mood?

“Damn... I guess it can’t be helped seeing as how I’m not nearly as talented as Miss Fran over there is.”

Fortunately, he ended up randomly accepting his rejection, which honestly made me feel a bit unsettled. I’d been intending on thanking him, but I ended up doing something rude instead.

I quickly handed him something to make up for it. I’d been planning on giving it to him later as a form of thanks regardless, but the timing seemed to work out perfectly.

“I can’t make you one of my apprentices, but I can give you this.”

“This...? Wait! W-Wh-what!? You have to be kidding me! Is it really okay for me to have this!? Am I dreaming!?”

“What did you receive, Colbert?”

“Groooooossss”

“Is that supposed to be like a treasure map or something?”

“Shut up Lydia, you’re being rude! A-Ahh, right, so as I was saying, thank you very much for giving me something of such value!”

The thing I gave him was my curry rice recipe. I’m glad he was that happy to receive it, really made it worth giving.

The Luciel Conglomerate had asked to buy the curry bread recipe back when we went looking for magic stones, so I figured it might be a good idea to hand copies my curry recipe over to everyone that had helped us.

Naturally, I knew that the conglomerate wouldn’t be all that happy about us giving the curry rice recipe away for free if they ended up buying the curry bread one, even if the two were technically different dishes. That said, we still did need money in order to buy magic stones. Hence, we ended up giving them several other recipes for cheap as well in order to appease them. As a result, they did ultimately end up agreeing to

letting us give away the recipe for the curry's roux.

The other people we'd been planning to give the recipe to were Io, the old guy at the Chef's Guild, and the cook at the inn we were staying at.

I'd really love for it to end up developing into Barbra's speciality or something like that. I'm really looking forward to seeing all the variations that'd spawn from the recipe.

But yeah, the party went by pretty smoothly. We somehow managed to calm Colbert down and enjoy ourselves.

It actually turned out to be the first party I actually was really a part of ever since reincarnating. I mean, I was totally okay with being a sword, but this wasn't bad at all either. I honestly really enjoyed the two hours I spent just doing whatever.

It looked like Fran had herself a pretty good night too. She'd actually ended up humming in the shower after getting back to the inn.

"Woof..."

[Here's a super spicy hamburger. Eat it and cheer up a bit.]

"Woof..."

Urushi was really disappointed by the fact that he couldn't join us, and hence, ended up missing out on a bunch of delicious food.

[Don't worry, they'll be more good stuff to eat in the future, so cheer up, okay?]

"Woof..."

And so, morning came.

The first thing we did was make our way to front Barbra's gate with a clear blue sky up above us.

[Looks like a good day to set out on a journey.]

I quickly went over our plans in order to confirm them.

We were going to set off for Ulmutt; it'd take us about five days for us to get there.

We'd then dive into the city's two dungeons and level up before finally taking part in the city's martial arts competition. This pretty much went without saying, but our goal would be to win it.

[Ulmutt, huh? I'm really looking forward to it.]

"To dungeon diving."

"Woof!"

[We've bought everything we needed to buy, learned everything we needed to learn, and even bid all our farewells to everyone that mattered.]

Amanda had cried in response to our departure. She wasn't going to leave till the orphanage was back on its feet, but it seemed like she was planning to meet us in Ulmutt once it was.

[Hopefully we'll have gotten a lot stronger by the next time we meet her.]

"Nn. Will for sure."

[Yup. Anyways, I think it's about time for us to go.]

"Nn."

"Woof!"



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